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# SPIRITUAL LIFE THROUGH WORSHIP

by  
CLINTON M. CHERRY



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## *Centrality of Worship*

WORSHIP MARKS THE uniqueness of the Church. Many of the other services which the Church is impelled to render are also performed with less or greater effectiveness by other agencies. But the Church alone can bring people to the worship of Him who is the Lord of the Church and of History. . . . a very vital responsibility which lies at the heart of everything else that we do as The Methodist Church.

We rejoice at the many evidences throughout the Church, among both ministers and congregations, of a reawakened realization of the centrality of this ministry of worship, and consequently of studied efforts to make it more effective. But obviously we have a long way to go to recover from the misunderstanding and the neglect from which this high art has suffered. To be a church, any local congregation must be, first and foremost, a worshipping community, with full appreciation of at least these three aspects of worship.

1. Worship is an offering which man brings to God of his time, his attention, his mind and heart and will. And therefore we are beholden to make it in the best form we can offer. There is no place for casualness, slovenliness, mediocrity and ugliness.

2. Worship is a "means of grace." When men worship "in spirit and in truth" something happens to them. There must be a reawakened sense of such expectancy and reality.

3. Worship, especially public worship, is a witness men give to the faith that is in them, a witness that is desperately needed today.

—Report, the Commission on Worship and the Fine Arts  
to District Superintendents of The Methodist Church



## Foreword

WORSHIP, EVEN WHEN it is formal, need not be cold and lifeless; and the spiritual life, though it is warm and lively, need not be afraid of worship. The time has come to put the two together for their mutual benefit, and this little book is an attempt to do so.

The author can claim no special qualifications for the task, but he admits to a growing enthusiasm as he dipped ever more deeply into the subject. He became convinced that Christians need to know much more about worship and to make much more of its practice, in public and in private. The spiritual life cannot but gain from such growth in experience on the part of all who love Christ.

This book is particularly directed to laymen. At points it may seem a bit abstruse; but, being written and not spoken, it will be possible to reread what is not clear at first sight, and it is hoped that it will be worth that extra effort. Certainly, the subject as such is worth the best that can be given to it. It is not the kind of subject that can be made entirely easy, but it pays good dividends on the effort invested in it. The questions at the end of the chapters may help in making profitable use of the material. Many Bible references are also given, partly to ground what is said in the Word of God, partly to make the Bible useful as a devotional book.

The chapters of the book were read consecutively at the mid-week services on Wednesday, and the reactions of the people were obtained. Many of the questions, also, were discussed, and there was a lively response.

May God bless this humble effort for what it is worth to his kingdom, and bless the reader who may look into it for stimulation of his own experience in worship and his own growth in the spiritual life.

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## CHAPTER I

### WHAT IS WORSHIP?

WORSHIP IS MAN'S answer to God's call. In the Book of Genesis is the bold but beautiful story of God walking in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). God calls out to man, "Where are you?" But man does not reply because he has sinned and is unable to respond to God. But the implication of the story is that Adam had often previously responded to God, that it is natural for God to call and for man to answer. If he does not answer, it is only because there is something that stands in the way. For man is made to respond to God.

Another biblical story is that of Isaiah who saw the Lord in a vision he had in the temple (Isaiah 6:1). With the vision came the chant of the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." Isaiah is immediately overcome with a sense of sin, but he is assured of God's forgiveness. Then comes the divine call, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And Isaiah says, "Here am I, send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). God called and Isaiah answered, and the experience was one of worship.

We worship wherever and whenever we are aware of God. If we are truly aware of God, it is impossible for us to do otherwise. For God is the Creator, and we are his creation. It is natural for us to acknowledge our dependence upon God, and to express our gratitude to God. And something within us draws us to God in spite of all our limitations. "Deep calls to deep" (Psalms 42:7a), and we are moved to worship.

*Worship is the human response to God*, but the Bible makes it clear that God was concerned with us before we were concerned with him. Not only did God create us, but he was concerned when man turned away from him in sin. When the first man sinned, God sought him in the Garden and found him, though man had tried to hide from him. Of course, God's word to man was then one of judgment, as it always is when man sins, but God did



not stop with that. He appealed to man to be better. In the Genesis story of Cain and Abel, God says to Cain, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Genesis 4:7). Through Moses and the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17) God initiated a program of law to define sin (Romans 7:7), and through the prophets God challenged the people to righteousness, "rising up early and sending" his servants (Jeremiah 25:4 RV), as the Hebrew says so picturesquely. And finally, in Jesus Christ, his Son, God unmistakably demonstrated his love and "publicly portrayed" it in the Cross (Galatians 3:1), so that men might know what sin really meant and the length to which God was willing to go to win men back to himself. All this is the wonder of our salvation. All this is the loving offer of God himself to us. All this is what God has done for us.

But we must do our part. We must respond to God's appeal. We must explore the love and friendship which he offers us. Worship is the way.

Everybody who has friends works at friendship. He thinks of his friends; he shares his experiences with them; he writes them letters; he remembers them with gifts made meaningful with love and appreciation. Friendship dies when it is unexpressed.

So it is of our experience with God. We must think about him. We must communicate with him. We must share our experiences with him. We must give him of our time and talent and substance as expressions of our love and devotion. We must, in short, worship him.

Worship, therefore, is a comprehensive thing. It calls for repentance and forgiveness, for the awareness of God means immediate awareness of one's own limitations and sins. It involves prayer, for prayer is the heart of worship. It demands commitment, for the quality of worship depends on the consecration of life to God. It means discipline, for the response to God is the approach to the Creator, the greatest of all beings. As God is the greatest thought of which man is capable, so worship is the highest achievement of all man's efforts.

Yet worship is not any one pattern or form of procedure. In the Christian Church it varies from the extreme formalism of the



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Catholic (Greek and Roman) Church to the extreme simplicity of the Quaker meeting. It may be debated which form of Christian worship is the most effective, but it can hardly be denied that all Christians worship in one way or another. Most of us inherit the way we worship, and we take it for granted. The day may never come when all Christians worship God in the same way, because worship is the *human* response to God, and human beings differ from each other in all things, including worship. We have different likes and dislikes, and to some the form is meaningful and the indispensable vehicle of worship, while to others form is an actual hindrance to worship. Fundamentally, worship is an attitude of mind, and not a device. It is a yearning of the heart for God (see Psalms 42:1-2).

Nevertheless, worship is not formless. Even in the Quaker meeting there is the discipline of silence, deliberate waiting until the Spirit of God moves the worshiper to response. He waits upon God in quiet thought until something happens within, which is probably equivalent to what happens to the worshiper who finds God in the ritual of, say, the Communion Service. Similarly, in those churches where there is much singing and testifying and responding, where *Amen's* and *Hallelujah's* ring out, where the preaching is an appeal to the emotions, even where feet are stamped and chairs are overturned, there can be discerned a genuine response to God. Lives are changed and uplifted and sustained in the experience. There is an underlying pattern to it which constitutes the response of the person who naturally expresses himself in the demonstrations which make up his worship.

The one thing essential in worship is that God should be supreme. Worship is the human response to God, and so is what man does, but the end of it is God. If it ends in the preacher or priest, it is not worship. If it ends in entertainment, it is not worship. If it ends in a display of human talent, it is not worship. If it ends in self-concern, or personal glory, or a smooth performance, or even a great crowd, it is not worship. *Worship is always an experience of God.* Without God in it, worship is dead.

Worship, then, involves two factors. On the one hand, it is something man does in response to God; and on the other hand, it is the realization of the presence of God. It is a human respon-

sibility. We must worship as best we can, using all the resources at our disposal to make our worship acceptable and vital. But the finest ritual, the most carefully planned occasion, will fail to be worship if it is not crowned with the "vision glorious" in a way that is meaningful to those who participate.

The purpose of this little book is to help us to understand our part in worship and, by so understanding, to enable us "to practice the presence of God." As we venture forth in this great field, may we be aware of the privilege of worship and eager to know as much about it as possible. For if we were to appropriate it in all of its rich meaning, it would make for us the difference between eternal life and eternal death, and that beginning here and now.

### Insight into Meanings

It might be helpful at the beginning of our study to understand the terms that are often used in connection with Christian worship. The first of these is the word itself, *worship* or "worth-ship," as it was originally spelled, an Anglo-Saxon word whose "th" was lost in the fourteenth century. It means, of course, ascribing worth to God.

Another word is *service*, or divine service, which means serving God by ascribing worth to him.

Still another word is *minister*, which is from the Latin, originally meaning "lesser one," contrasting with *magister*, "greater one." God is the Greater One to whom the minister, the lesser one, offers the service of worship. Minister ordinarily means "servant" in the Latin, as *magister* means "master."

From the Greek comes the word *liturgy*, originally meaning "public (*leitōs*) work (*ergon*)," or, since *leitōs* comes from *laos*, "people," meaning "working for the people." It was applied originally to service rendered to the state, but when applied to God, it referred to what the minister did for God on behalf of the people. Strictly speaking, this meant celebrating the Holy Communion, or Mass as it came to be in the Roman Catholic Church. Hence, the "liturgical churches" are those which celebrate Communion, and the "non-liturgical churches" are properly, those which, like the Society of Friends, have no Communion Service.



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In ordinary use, however, liturgy means simply the order of worship.

From the Latin, *ritus*, "custom," especially a religious custom or ceremony, is the word *ritual*. Strictly speaking, this is used for the conduct, gesture and symbols that accompany and accomplish the liturgy, but in ordinary usage the word is the equivalent of liturgy. It can refer to any mode of worship, more or less formal.

We now come to the twin terms, *laity* and *clergy*. The former, from *laos*, "people," refers to those not appointed to render service in worship while the term, *clergy*, from the Greek, *klerikos* (from *kleros*, lot, allotment), and the Latin, *clericus*, clergyman or clerk, refers to those whose lot is cast with the Lord, not man (Deuteronomy 18:2) and are given an allotment of God's people to care for (1 Peter 5:3).

The term *priest* is from the Greek *presbyter*, "elder," originally an older and presumably wiser man, chosen with others from the congregation to have oversight of a synagogue. It began as purely a lay term.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do most church services accomplish the experience of worship?
2. What have been your own most significant experiences of worship—in church, or outside of church? How did God become real to you?
3. Can worship experiences be sudden and unexpected? Consider Genesis 28:10-22.
4. Can worship services be too carefully planned? Is it right not to plan them, leaving what is done to "the inspiration of the Spirit"?
5. How can planning for worship leave more room for the work of God's Spirit?



## CHAPTER II

### THE UNIVERSALITY OF WORSHIP

AS FAR BACK as it has been possible to trace the story of man, it has been found that he has worshiped in one way or another. Sometimes the evidence of this worship has been grim. The Aztec Indians offered human sacrifices to the sun as a god.

Human sacrifice was, tragically, a common feature of primitive worship, and there are echoes of it in the Bible. "In his [Ahab's] days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho; he laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his first-born, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub," we read in 1 Kings 16:34, a veiled reference to the fact that Hiel sacrificed a son at the beginning and a son at the ending of the city-building in order to secure divine favor for his enterprise. Human sacrifice was practiced, even by the kings of Judah (Ahaz, 2 Kings 16:3; Manasseh, 2 Kings 21:6), but it was condemned by the Bible as something done by "the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel" (cf. 2 Kings 3:27).

These dreadful incidents show how difficult it was to eradicate some aspects of primitive worship which was inherited from prehistoric times. Indeed, many scholars think that the famous story of Abraham's offering of Isaac to the Lord in Genesis, chapter 22, is partly intended to teach Israel that human sacrifice was never to be part of the worship of their God (Deuteronomy 18:9), and he obeys the command of God as he should, even though it blasted all his hopes. But the intent of God is made plain in the glorious climax of the story: "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him!" (Genesis 22:12). Abraham found a ram as a substitute, and he called the place "The-Lord-will-provide." God did indeed provide, not only a ram but a better insight into the nature of his worship (Jeremiah 7:31).

### Methods Are Essential

Man's habits from the beginning, therefore, have included the

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worship of God by some method, however misguided or uninformed. Man has believed in some kind of God, he has tried to make contact with that God, and he has gone to great lengths and much personal sacrifice to do so. This is a very significant fact about man, and about God. On the one hand, it means that man is a creature made to worship; on the other, it means that God has been trying to make himself known to man, even when man has had very little capacity to understand.

What has been true of the past, as one goes backward in time, is true of the present when one travels abroad. Let us take an imaginary trip around the world. Let us cross the Pacific and stop at Japan. There we will see a Shinto shrine with its torii-gateway opening on a tree-shaded yard leading to a simple building housing a symbol of the sun goddess, Amaterasu; a mirror, perhaps, or a jewel. Pilgrims toss their coins into a contribution box, ring a gong by pulling on a rope, clap their hands to draw the attention of the gods (for there are many besides the sun goddess), join their palms, and bow their heads in a wish or prayer, and then go on their way. . . .

Or we might come across a Buddhist temple in Japan, or China, or Tibet, or Burma. We would discover that Buddhist worship varied from place to place, for Buddhism, like Christianity, has different forms, but we would very likely find an image of the Buddha sitting cross-legged with hands on thighs in the meditative pose that is familiar, and we would know that Buddhist worship consisted basically of getting hold, somehow, of the Buddha's teaching that life is vain and one has to be willing to escape from it and be lost in God. . . .

Or we might stop in India to see how they worshiped there, and be confused anew at the bewildering variety of gods and temples. We would see strange architecture, and fierce and fantastic idols, and know that here, as also in China and other lands, fear plays a large part in worship. We would see a lot of superstition mixed in with the worship, too, and an intense desire to be saved from sin, or from the penalty of sin in the next life. The Hindu will do anything to be saved, even to the torturing of his body with self-inflicted pain, and the surrendering of every gain of life to become a beggar, in order to obtain a better chance

in the hereafter. But also not a few Hindus take the meditative way out, using the discipline of thought and self-control to renounce the illusion of worldly existence. . . .

Or we might pause in Indonesia, or Persia, or Arabia, or Turkey, or anywhere in North Africa, and find people going as Mohammedans to mosques to worship Allah as the one and only God. We should hear the call to prayer of the muezzin, shouting from the tall minaret beside the mosque: "God is great. . . . Come to prayer! Come to salvation!" We should see the *men* go, barefooted but with hats on, crowding into the courtyard, standing stolid, hearing the exposition of the Mohammedan Bible, the Koran, praying in unison, whether standing or kneeling or bent with forehead to the ground, and we should notice no seats, no organ, no altar, no pictures, no idols. We should also notice that it was Friday, the Mohammedan holy day. . . .

Or, finally, we might go southward in Africa and peer into the jungle to see the primitive Bantu at worship. Here we would find man as near to the prehistoric in worship as living examples show. It would be pitiful, too, because everywhere would be spirits, most of them evil, in trees and streams and animals; yes, and in supposedly bewitched persons, and everywhere people would be afraid of these evil spirits and would constantly be trying to protect themselves from them. There would be witchcraft and the medicine man and spells and incantations. Worship would be the constant business of keeping on the good side of the unseen powers all around. We should feel very sorry for these primitive people and wish that they could be free from the ignorance that makes them so afraid.

### Worship Is Natural

But one thing this journey around the world would do for us above everything else: it would convince us that *worship is as natural as breathing, as essential, as eating and sleeping*. Man is a worshipping creature because he was made by God for fellowship with God, and he cannot be content without God. Even if his attempt to find God is not very successful, he must still try, just as he must try to eat if he is hungry, and sleep if he is tired. He can no more avoid worshipping than he can avoid breathing.



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This is true even of those who think they are atheists and do not believe in God. The instinct to worship is so strong in human nature that such men, though they do not worship God, end by worshiping the state, or some man who personifies the state. Such is the case in totalitarian countries, whose rulers have emblazoned their pictures in public places and demanded adulation, and who, even though dead, have been preserved as bodies in glass-lidded coffins for worshiping throngs to pass and venerate. All this is blasphemy to God, the only One who is to be worshiped, and vastly more reprehensible than the imperfect worship of the non-Christian religions. The basic sin is pride, and the work of pride is the worship of man or man's effort instead of God, and the worst of such worship is the worship of self. The Bible will have none of it (Isaiah 44:9-20; Daniel 4:28-37; Revelation 14:6-11).

Worship, then, belongs to man to offer and to God to receive. It is something which God as Creator is entitled to, and which man as creature needs to do. Can we determine what it is in man that impels him to worship?

There is, first, the fact that he is a creature with a *sense of dependence*. Unless man deceives himself, he knows that all that he is and hopes to be, he owes to a power other than himself. He did not make the world in which he finds himself. He did not provide the resources which he uses for his benefit. He did not give himself the abilities by means of which he makes use of the resources provided. He did not even create himself as the one who is entitled to live in and benefit by this world (see Genesis 1:28). Now, unless a man ignores all these considerations, deliberately or otherwise, he will acknowledge the power on which he depends, and this acknowledgement involves worship. For worship, as we have seen, is man's response to God.

This acknowledgement can be in terms of *gratitude*. Man can thank the Creator for his goodness. "Bless the Lord, O my soul," cries the Psalmist, "and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (Psalms 103:1-2). Even after people have, as they think, given up belief in God, they are moved to thankfulness for benefits received for which they are not themselves responsible. Sir Leslie Stedham, a noble man but an agnostic, on the death of his wife wrote a

friend, "I feel that I do want to thank somebody that I loved her as well as a man can love." He had no God to thank, but he still had the impulse to thank. He could not deny what was in him to do. It is fundamental to our human nature to have this response; and, if we reject it, we do violence to our beings and pay the penalty in twisted personalities. Happy, normal people are those who are grateful for favors received, and this applies to favors received from God as well as from man.

The acknowledgement of God can also be in terms of *need*. Worship often was (and sometimes is) a means of getting from God what man needed in order to get along: better crops (Malachi 3:10-11), or rain for dried-up fields (Amos 4:7-8), or birth for barren wombs (1 Samuel 1:9-11), or a male child for an heir (Genesis 30:6-22), or victory over enemies (1 Kings 8:44-45; 1 Samuel 13:8-12), or deliverance from disease or the power that causes disease (Mark 9:29). Primitive worship was also primitive science, man's earliest attempt to manage nature for man's benefit (cf. Genesis 1:28), and it included magic. Magic is worship at its lowest level because it is centered in man's desires and not in God's will.

It is significant that modern science was not born until man decided to turn away from what he demanded and to ask how nature actually operated. Then, by co-operating with the way nature actually did things, man obtained from nature what he could not secure when he tried to make nature do things his way. The classic example of this is found in alchemy, the ill-fated effort of man to transmute lead into gold and "get rich quick." He failed because he was concerned not with what nature did but with what he wanted. Today, physicists can change one element into another, and even create new elements, because they understand the structure of the atom and how nature builds atoms. The result is power and wealth, far beyond the wildest dreams of the alchemists. The sin of modern man is that he has used the power of God, now that he has discovered its secret, without acknowledging its source in God. The only thing that can save man from the selfishness that is inherent in his need, and the pride that goes with his increasing power, is man's worship of the God who has provided for man's need in the world about him,

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and concern with God's will, which is implied in God's worship. Man once worshiped because he had needs he knew not how else to meet; man must now worship because he has power he knows not how else to control.

There is at least one reason why man must worship. It is his *hunger for fulfillment*. The strange difference between man and the animals is that the animals are apparently quite content to conform to their environment. To be sure, ants will build underground colonies; and bees, hives; and beavers, dams; and birds, nests; but all these efforts seem to be attempts to protect the life cycle and improve the living conditions of the species. But man goes further. He wants to know why he is here and where he is going. He wants to live here, but he thinks of the hereafter, if not also of the "herebefore." He demands an explanation of things. He can deny himself for the sake of others who do not even belong to him. He can give up the secure present for the uncertain future, as did Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3); he can die to be true to a promise, as did the daughter of Jephtha (Judges 11:36); he can give his life for a cause that he himself can never benefit from in this world, as did the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 4:7-12; cf. 11:24-29).

There is in man a "divine discontent," a wonderful restlessness, something unfinished that longs for fulfillment. Nothing in this world can completely satisfy it, and the life on earth cannot meet its desire. It is something which belongs to God, which God has put in man because man is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). It is the reason why man worships. Man is not completely man until he finds himself acknowledging God at the footstool of God's feet.

Worship, then, is a universal fact because it is a necessity of human nature, and it is a necessity of human nature because God made it so. Regardless of race or religion, or of time and place, worship characterizes the human race. There is good worship and bad worship, true worship and false worship, satisfying worship and unsatisfying worship, but there is always worship of some sort and some kind. As Christians we believe that the only complete worship is that which is offered to God through Christ, and for that reason we now turn to the Bible and trace the story



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of worship through its pages. But at this point it is important to recognize that we are dealing with something which is not done, and never was done in a corner, and that there is no more important activity in life than the experience of God in worship.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you worshiped in other churches than your own denomination and found the experience satisfying? Can you remember what impressed you?

2. Have you worshiped in non-Christian churches, perhaps in a synagogue, and still found the experience satisfying to some degree? Why do you think it was so?

3. How would you relate to this chapter the words in Acts 17:24-28, "The God who made the world and everything in it . . . made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth . . . that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'in him we live and move and have our being' "?

4. Do you think that God gives any credit to those who worship him sincerely, though ignorantly? On this problem consult Acts 17:30; 14:16-17; Luke 7:9; 12:48; Mark 11:17 (the Court of the Gentiles was for the worship of non-Jews).

5. Do you think that idolatry, including its subtle modern forms, is the most sinister of all evils? See Romans 1:18-23.

6. Can you think of other reasons than those listed for men to worship?

7. Do you think worship should be beautiful (in the artistic sense)? In what ways do you think beauty is legitimate in worship? Consider the church building, the music (organ selections, choir anthems, the hymns); the use of gowns, vestments, symbols; pictures, decorations, lighting; processions and recessions; forms and ceremonies (including written prayers or sermons in order to have better language-expression).

## CHAPTER III

# WORSHIP IN THE BIBLE

### In the Old Testament

WORSHIP IN THE Bible begins in the idea of sacrifice. Early we read of Cain and Abel, each bringing the sacrifice which he thought was acceptable to God, the former of "the fruit of the ground," the latter of "the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions." "And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard" (Genesis 4:4-5). This looks, at first blush, as if the Lord preferred animal sacrifice to vegetable, but the story goes deeper than that. "The Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it'" (Genesis 4:6, 7).

The very essence of the Old Testament idea of sacrifice is that it must be accompanied by repentance and the right attitude of heart. Actually, sacrifice is as old as worship itself; its origin is lost in the mists of prehistory. Sacrifice was accepted by the Hebrew people as the command of God, and necessary to his worship; and though like Cain, many Hebrews at first thought that sacrifice was efficacious in itself and had some sort of magical power to command God's good will, the Hebrews came in time to understand, under the guidance of God's Spirit, that sacrifice was not a *substitute* for a right attitude but an *expression* of it.

That Abel's sacrifice of an animal was not intrinsically better than Cain's sacrifice of vegetables in the history of Israel, is proved by the fact that the sacrificial system provided for both kinds of sacrifice. The Israelites offered them as ordinances of God: animal sacrifices for burnt offerings, guilt offerings, sin offerings, peace offerings; and vegetable sacrifices for meal offerings, firstfruits, tithes, incense. Salt, a mineral, had to be added to all sacrifices (Leviticus 2:13). Moreover, it was not thought that only animal

sacrifice could "make atonement" for sin, for cereal offerings could also serve that purpose (Ezekiel 45:15-17). Leviticus 5: 11-13 is quite specific on this: "But if he [the worshiper] cannot afford two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then he shall bring, as his offering for the sin which he has committed, a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering . . . and the priest shall take a handful of it as its memorial portion and burn this on the altar. . . . Thus the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed. . . ." Even things which were not sacrifices at all could serve for atonement (see Exodus 30:15 f., money; Numbers 31:50, jewelry), though blood was the normal means because it symbolized life (Leviticus 17:11).

The Hebrews of the Old Testament understood that it was God who forgave in his own way by his own will (Exodus 34:7-9), and it was not for his people to question his way or his will. They were to do whatever he commanded with respect to sacrifice or anything else, but they knew that no sacrifice could bind the Lord to forgive if he did not will to forgive, and they knew that he could forgive without sacrifice if he so chose. The sacrifice itself did not atone for a wrong done, as the law concerning the guilt offering shows (Leviticus 6:4-7). By that law, the wrongdoer is to make restitution to the man wronged and *then* bring a guilt-offering to the Lord. The most amazing fact of all is that sins committed "with a high hand" (i.e., deliberate sins) could not be atoned for at all; the sinner must be cut off from his people (Numbers 15:27-31; cf. 9:13). Sacrifice was necessary and important because God commanded it, but it had to be an expression of a repentant heart, not a substitute for it, and God forgave, not because of the sacrifice in itself, but because of the repentant and obedient heart which the sacrifice expressed.

Now this ethical understanding of sacrifice in worship is due in part to the work of the great prophets of the eighth century before Christ, and later. Some of them went to extremes in criticizing the sacrificial system. *Amos* cries on behalf of the Lord: "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them" (5:21-22). *Micah* asks: "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before



God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? . . . Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (6:6-7, a significant reference to human sacrifice). *Jeremiah* says plainly: ". . . I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices" (7:22). This seems to mean that much of the sacrificial system developed after the time of Moses.

What do these prophets want as the worship of the Lord? Here it is in their own words: *Amos* says, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (5:24). *Micah* says, "He [God] has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (6:8). *Jeremiah* says, "This command I gave them, [your fathers] 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you'" (7:23). In other words, the worship of God is to be found in social justice; the service of God is the service of one's fellow men; one's attitude toward God is determined by his attitude toward humanity.

Is this prophetic criticism of sacrifice an abolishment of it? Not if we go by the Bible as a whole. Not if we go by all the prophets, rather than by just some of them. F. S. Marsh well says, "Sacrificial worship was the only kind of public worship known to the prophets: certainly it was the only kind of worship which the mass of the people of their time could recognize as such. . . . We must suppose that they neither expected nor desired sacrifice to cease."<sup>1</sup> The only prophet who visualized religion without a temple was *Jeremiah* (15:10) whose unhappy task it was to predict the destruction of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of the Hebrews. He urged reliance on inward religion (31:31-34) and not on the outward temple (chapter 7), a necessary emphasis for the time but one which puzzled and displeased the people (chapter 26).

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<sup>1</sup> "Sacrifice and Priesthood in the Old Testament," *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture, Part I*, pp. 653 f.

## SPIRITUAL LIFE THROUGH WORSHIP

But Jeremiah was not against the temple as such (26:1-3) and he did predict a restoration (chapters 30, 31). It was Ezekiel who pictured that restoration in detail, and the plan he set forth called for an ideal temple in an ideal land served by an ideal priesthood in accordance with an ideal law (chapters 40 to 48), the wonderful Holiness Code (cf. Leviticus, chapter 19). (This vision of Ezekiel had significant fulfillment in the New Testament book of Hebrews.)

Thus the ethical passion of the prophets was combined with the religious devotion of the priests in a synthesis that characterized the worship of Israel from that day on. Strange as it may seem to us who have benefitted from the work of the great prophets, religion and ethics were originally not the same thing. Religion was worship as such, the way to deal with God; ethics was behavior, the way to deal with one's fellow men; and the two did not necessarily have much to do with each other. But, thanks to the prophets, the Hebrews came to understand that as God was the God of all men, first of Israel, then of all nations, God was interested in what happened to others, and God demanded, as part of his worship, right behavior toward others. So Isaiah says, "Bring no more vain offerings. . . . but wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (1, 13, 16-17). The Psalmist sets the true mood of Old Testament worship:

"Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

And who shall stand in His holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

who does not lift up his soul to what is false,

and does not swear deceitfully.

He will receive blessing from the Lord,

and vindication from the God of his salvation" (24:4-5).

And Jesus sums up the whole matter by saying, "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar

and go, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

## In the New Testament

By the time of Jesus, Jewish worship had reached its fullest development. It had a magnificent temple, built by Herod the Great, and in it served twenty-four "courses" or divisions of priests, of whom Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was one (belonging to the division of Abijah, Luke 1:5). There were Levites and temple choirs with accompanying music. There was the daily sacrifice, morning and evening, and "the hour of incense" (Luke 1:10), "the hour of Prayer" (Acts 3:1), the yearly feasts (including Passover, Mark 14:1; Pentecost, Acts 2:1; Tabernacles, John 7:2; Dedication, John 10:22), and the Day of Atonement (Leviticus, chapter 16; see Hebrews 9:6-7) when the high priest alone entered the Holy of Holies for the only time in the whole year.

As a boy, Jesus got his inspiration in the temple (Luke 2:49). He and his brothers attended the feasts (John 7:10; he and his disciples paid the temple tax (Matthew 17:24-27). Jesus commanded obedience of priestly requirements (Mark 1:44) and respect for those "on Moses' seat" (Matthew 23:1); he taught daily in the temple (Mark 14:49); he cleaned out the Court of the Gentiles and recognized the temple as "a house of prayer for all the nations" (Mark 11:17; Isaiah 56:7).

On the other hand, Jesus was critical, in the spirit of the prophets, of the emptiness of temple worship (Mark 11:17), or any worship (Matthew 6:7), and the unworthiness of the leaders of religion (Mark 11:17; Matthew 23:13, etc.). Paul, also, was critical (Acts 23:3), and made it plain that the law had no power to make one good (Romans 7:21-24), though it could, and did, define sin and condemn the sinner (Romans 7:7-11). But Paul was really dealing with the moral law, not the ritual. It was the Book of Hebrews that showed that the system of sacrifices and priesthood in the Law was powerless to provide complete atonement (7:18-19); that it was, in fact, but a "shadowing" of the



perfect sacrifice to be offered by the perfect priest to be provided by God (7:26; 8:1-2; 9:11-12).

Jesus Christ made the perfect sacrifice because it was of himself, the Son of God, offered by himself, the perfect high priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:11—a commentary should be consulted); and as the perfect deed it was done once for all, never to be repeated (9:12, 25-28; 10:11-14), the eternal revealed in time. This sacrifice is efficacious to all who accept it by faith (10:22; 12:2). With the sacrifice of himself, Jesus not only entered the Holy of Holies, but he opened it up for us, a "new and living way . . . through the curtain" (10:20), so that, with him, we enter into the very presence of God. As our representative and priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ is to us all that we need to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Worship in the New Testament, therefore, centers in the sacrifice of Christ as the means by which we come to God. In a sense it is human sacrifice, after all (see chapter 2). But it is not the horrible immolation of an unwilling or passive victim to a vengeful deity. It is the self-giving act of a consecrated life (John 10:18). Nor is it merely the act of man; for, in identity of spirit with his Father, Jesus acted for God and was the act of God, so that in him "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16; see Romans 5:8).

Jesus, therefore, was not so much the sacrifice of man to God as of God for man, God doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. His death was not made necessary for the appeasement of God; it was rather the act of God to overcome sin, the obstacle that stood in the way of man's fellowship with God. This overcoming began with the death of Jesus, wrought by man's sin and showing the sinfulness of it, yet provided by God's love and showing the extent of it. God offered the Representative, the God-man, in whose death the clash between sin's hate and God's love might be the very place (the cross) where man's repentance is met with God's forgiveness. This kind of reconciliation is possible only by sacrifice, the sacrifice of a person who cares enough for others to forget himself and let them gain at his expense (Mark 10:45). We have intimations of this in life (John 15:13), and a reflection of it in Paul (Romans 9:3; 2 Corinthians 5:18 to 6:10), but it

is supremely what it is in Jesus, who saved others by not saving himself (Mark 15:31) and showed himself to be a Son of God (Mark 15:39).

The earliest observance of the sacrificial death of Christ is the Lord's Supper. Jesus gathered his disciples about him to have with them his last meal on earth; but the first meal, as it were, in the kingdom of God (Luke 22:15-16), and to remind them that this was possible only because he was dying for them—dying that they might truly repent and desire the Kingdom; dying that God might fully forgive (in view of their repentance) and accept them into the Kingdom—for sin was no light matter, and only the blood of sacrifice could show how sinful sin was and how loving God is. This, somehow, the disciples had to know, and so Jesus said, using bread, "This is my body!" and again, using wine, "This is my blood!" They never forgot it. And daily, when they ate and drank, they set aside bread and wine for this remembrance (Acts 2:42, 46). Then later, owing, perhaps, to the influence of Paul (1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 33-34), they had a separate Lord's Supper which became purely an act of worship.

But the Lord's Supper was always Communion: fellowship with the risen Lord and fellowship with each other, as together in him his followers formed the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:29). Indeed, the very first celebrations of the Lord's Supper by the disciples were in commemoration of Jesus' resurrection rather than of his death, and they were joyful gatherings. That is probably why the term, Eucharist (Thanksgiving), came to be applied to the observance. Some of the resurrection appearances of Jesus seem to have been at mealtime (Luke 24:30-36; 41-43; John 21:9-13; cf. Acts 2:10, 40-41), and he was known to his disciples in "the breaking of bread" (Luke 24:30; cf. Acts 2:46), reminiscent of his practice in life and, particularly, of the Last Supper.<sup>2</sup>

And so the first disciples "broke bread" from house to house, especially on the Lord's day (Revelation 1:10), the first day of

<sup>2</sup> For a further discussion of this the reader is referred to Friedrich Heiler, *The Spirit of Worship*, Part I, Chapter 2 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926) and Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, pp. 13-25 (London: SCM Press, 1953).

the week, when their Lord rose from the dead. As they did so, they thought of the living Christ and of how he would come again and establish his Kingdom. But they could not forget his death on earth, and pondered why it had to be. Thus the Lord's Supper became a dual celebration, commemorating Jesus' death on the one hand; and, on the other, anticipating the final victory of the living Christ. As Paul put it, ". . . as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

In a real sense, however, the Lord's Supper was the realization of the presence of the living Christ. He came to those first Christians in the Spirit as he had appeared to them at mealtime as the resurrection Jesus. Thus the idea of the Real Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper goes back to the very beginning of it. We know from the Gospels that the resurrection appearances of Jesus were mainly, if not exclusively, to his disciples, and it was his living presence among them that made them the church, the body of which he was the head. It was the failure to discern this body that was so serious an offense in connection with the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:29-30).

Because the church was the body of Christ, it had to be a unity (1 Corinthians 10:17; John 17:22-23), and if the presence of Christ was to be actualized in it, it could have no foreign element. Hence, non-Christians and, later, catechumens, were excluded from the Lord's Supper (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; *Didache* 9:5).<sup>3</sup> Nor could the body be corrupted by sin. Hence, there was a prayer of confession preceding the eating of the meal, as shown by the *Didache* (14:1), (*The Teaching of the Twelve*) and implied by Paul (1 Corinthians 11:27-28). Indeed, the *Didache*, echoing Matthew 5:23, stipulates that no one who has a quarrel with another can join in the meeting until there is a reconciliation, "that your sacrifice be not defiled" (14:2). The unity of Christian fellowship at the Lord's Supper was symbolized by the

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<sup>3</sup> The *Didache* (Greek, meaning "Teaching") or, to give it its full title, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, was an early Christian Manual of about A.D. 125, representing the practice of the churches in and around Antioch. The translation here used is that of Kirsopp Lake (*The Apostolic Fathers*, Loeb Classical Library, N.Y. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1930).



"holy kiss" (Romans 16:16; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14), and the kiss became part of the liturgy in Christian worship.

The coming of Christ at the Lord's Supper, in remembrance of his first coming, and in anticipation of his final coming, was symbolized by the prayer, "Maranatha" (Our Lord, come!) (1 Corinthians 16:22; Revelation 22:20), as indicated by the *Didache* (10:6). This, the earliest eucharistic prayer in Christianity, is to be connected with Revelation 3:20, where the living Christ says: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." Cullmann says: "This is the answer to the old eucharistic prayer: Maranatha! The prayer is fulfilled already in the community's celebrations of the Lord's Supper" (*Early Christian Worship*, p. 16).

Besides meeting in homes to "break bread" (the Lord's Supper, Acts, 2:46), the first followers of Jesus also went to the temple to the sacrifices there. This they did daily (Acts 3:1) and, especially, on the Sabbath (Saturday). But in the year A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans and the temple sacrifices ceased. Christianity had no further contact with Judaism except as Christian-Jews may have attended the synagogues in Palestine and throughout the Roman Empire. But the story in Acts does not encourage us to believe that the Jews welcomed this (cf. Acts 13:22-47) and it is probable that the Gentile Christians, at any rate, had little contact with the synagogue. The consequence was that the Sabbath quickly dropped out of Christianity, and the "Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10), Sunday, took its place. The fall of Jerusalem accelerated a process that was probably well along anyway, since, as we have said, the Lord's Supper was observed, especially, on the Lord's Day.

Nevertheless, the synagogue had an influence in Christianity. In government by elders (the older men), its custom of reading the Law and the Prophets, its homily or sermon (cf. Luke 4:21-27), its use of prayers, its instruction of children, its cultivation of almsgiving, were all influential in the growing church. In fact, Christian worship seems to have begun with a combination of the idea

of sacrifice, emphasized by the temple; and the use of the Scriptures, preaching and prayer, emphasized by the synagogue.

As we have seen, the idea of sacrifice was not only preserved but transformed in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The *Scriptures* also had their special use among Christians. Whereas, in the synagogue, the Law (Genesis to Deuteronomy) was emphasized as the revealed Word of God *per se*, in the church, appeal was made to other portions of the Holy Scriptures, particularly the Prophets, to prove that Jesus was the Christ. Also, the words of Jesus were preserved as the new Law for Christians, and the writings of such apostles as Paul were cherished as explaining the meaning of Christ and offering guidance to the developing church. Thus in Christian worship the New Testament came into being.

Christian *preaching* was at first proclamation of the nearness of the Kingdom and the messiahship of Jesus (cf. Acts 2:14-36), but it also took on the character of an exhortation to better Christian discipleship (cf. Hebrews) and churchmanship (cf. James). A marked feature of the preaching was the place accorded the prophets, a distinctly recognized "order" in the early church (1 Corinthians 12:28). The right of the prophets to speak was carefully guarded as essential to the free operation of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). The Spirit first found expression in the speaking with tongues (Acts 2:4), a phenomenon which Paul was anxious to improve in the direction of edifying the church (1 Corinthians 14:1-5), distinguishing between prophesying and speaking with tongues (v. 5), but not attempting to abolish the latter (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:18). Cullmann suggests that speaking with tongues came at the climax of the meeting when, in connection with the breaking of bread, the Maranatha-prayer was answered by the coming of the Lord in the Spirit. In any case, early Christian worship was worship in the Spirit (John 4:23) and, whatever its liturgical forms, was free to all, and many participated.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Paul, however, enjoins women to keep silent—in Corinth "as in all the churches" (1 Corinthians 14:33-34). This definitely reflects the usage of the synagogue where women occupied a separate section from that of the men, usually a balcony. At this point, Paul is forgetting his own insight

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Christian *prayer* included the Lord's Prayer, not only as a pattern of praying (Matthew 6:9) but as a form (Luke 11:2; cf. the *Didache* 8:3; "Pray thus three times a day"). The *Didache* also gives prayers of thanks to use with the Eucharist which closely parallel the synagogue prayers for the Passover. "But," it adds significantly, "suffer the prophets to hold Eucharist as they will" (10:7), a statement which must indicate that the use of formal prayers was at least a matter of choice. But again Cullmann says, "Primitive Christianity did not hesitate to use stereotyped liturgical formulae,"<sup>5</sup> the presence of the Spirit saving them from sterility.

Connected with the formal were the doxologies, amens, and benedictions that were used. These, too, were taken over from Judaism. *Doxologies* occur frequently in the Epistles, sometimes with "blessed" (Romans 1:25; 9:5; 2 Corinthians 11:31; Ephesians 1:3), sometimes with "glory" (Romans 11:36; Galatians 1:5; Philippians 4:20; 2 Timothy 4:18), representing the devotional mood of Judaism which was doubtless reflected in Christian worship. The *Amen* was said by the congregation, as shown by 1 Corinthians 14:16. The frequency of *benedictions* in the Epistles imply their use in worship (1 Corinthians 16:23; Galatians 6:18; Philippians 4:25; Revelation 22:21), the full tripartite liturgical form being found at 2 Corinthians 13:13. What about *psalms* and *hymns*? These are mentioned at Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19. Here, also, there was freedom, the individual being allowed to bring his own hymn (1 Corinthians 14:26). But hymns were sung by all, and sometimes antiphonally, as the correspondence of Pliny with the Emperor Trajan says, "They gathered regularly on a fixed day before sunrise to sing antiphonally a song to Christ as to a god."<sup>6</sup>

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that in Christ there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28). Christianity rightly gives women full equality with man in worship. Even in Acts we find women who were prophets (and presumably participants in worship, as indicated above. See Acts 21:9. What did Paul think of the daughter of Philip?).

<sup>5</sup> *Early Christian Worship*, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> As quoted by Cullmann (*Ibid.*, p. 30). It is dated A.D. 112, and represents the situation in Bithynia, on the Black Sea, where Pliny (the Younger) was governor.



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Pliny also says that the Christians bound themselves not to commit any crime, and he lists as forbidden what we recognize as the prohibitions of the Ten Commandments. *Commitment*, therefore, seems to have been part of early Christian worship.

Finally, *confession of faith*, beginning with the simple, "Jesus is Lord," again by the power of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3; cf. Romans 10:10; Philippians 2:11; 1 John 4:2-3; also, Matthew 10:32-33), and finding expression at the end of the New Testament period in the "symbol" of the Roman Church, the so-called Apostles' Creed,—such acknowledgement of belief of God-in-Christ was also apparently a part of early Christian worship.

New Testament worship, therefore, was rich in its content. It contained in germ, if not in full expression, much of what we do in worship today. Not all the elements mentioned<sup>7</sup> would find expression in every service, but they were all, potentially, part of the worship. Generally, the service had two parts: "the service of the Word" and the Lord's Supper. The latter was not a separate observance, but formed the climax of every service (see Acts 20:7).<sup>8</sup> This would be natural from the beginning if (as has been speculated) the first meeting place in Jerusalem was the home of John Mark's mother (Acts 12:12), indirectly referred to in Acts 2:1 ("in one place") and Mark 14:13-15, where occurred successively the Last Supper (cf. Mark 14:51-52. Is the "young man" Mark?), a resurrection-appearance of Jesus (Luke 24:33-43), and Pentecost (Acts, chapter 2). The one place would combine by association all the basic elements in Christian worship: the commemoration of Christ's death, the realization of his Living Presence, preaching and praying by the power of the Spirit. In any case, it guaranteed the edifying of the body of Christ, the church, of which the head and heart was the living Christ who

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<sup>7</sup> Others could be mentioned, e.g., intercessory prayer, an expression of the Christian concern (1 John 4:7) that excited the remark of the pagan who said, "See how these Christians love one another!" Also, the offering for the needy (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

See also the quotation from Justin Martyr at the end of this chapter.

<sup>8</sup> If the Lord's Supper was originally part of a regular meal (1 Corinthians 11:20-21), or of the meeting, perhaps the same meal, known as the Agapé (Love Feast), the whole was Christian worship. It would be patterned, as was the Last Supper of Jesus, on the ritual of the Passover Feast.

died but was alive for evermore among his own (Revelation 1:17-18, chapters 2 and 3).

For a glimpse of early Christian worship, let us look at the picture painted in words for us by Justin Martyr (for he was a martyr) about the year A.D. 150, at the close of the New Testament period. "On the day called the Day of the Sun there is a gathering in one place of us all who live in cities or in the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time allows. Then, when the reader has ceased, the president gives by word of mouth his admonition and exhortation to imitate these excellent things. Afterward we all rise at once and offer prayers; and when we have ceased to pray, bread is brought and wine and water, and the president likewise offers up prayers and thanksgivings as he has the ability, and the people assent, saying, 'Amen.' The distribution to each and the partaking of that for which thanks were given then take place; and to those not present a portion is sent by the hands of the deacons. Those who are well-to-do and willing to give, every one giving what he will, according to his own judgment, and the collection is deposited with the president, and he assists orphans and widows, and those who through sickness or any other cause are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers that are sojourning; and, in short, he has the care of all that are in need. Now we all hold our common meeting on the Day of the Sun, because it is the first day on which God, having changed the darkness and matter, created the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead" (*Apology* 1:67).

It is a lovely picture—and the Lord's Supper (commemorating the sacrifice of Christ, but with joy, because he is alive and makes alive those who are in him) is at the heart of it.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. If "going to church" is no substitute for the good life, is the good life a substitute for the church? Is this what the prophets were implying?

2. What part does sacrifice have in the modern Protestant service of worship? Could the offering be considered the equipment of the

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ancient sacrifice? What was the function of the offering in early Christian worship?

3. At what point in the modern service is the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ appropriated by the believer?

4. Do most Protestants prefer the sermon-service to the communion-service? Is the Lord's Supper as central in worship as it ought to be? How often do you think it should be observed?

5. Can the sermon be a means of worship? Is the sermon-service to be considered less worshipful than the communion-service. (For a discussion of this subject, see Henry Sloane Coffin: *Communion through Preaching*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952.)

6. In what ways do Protestants "realize the Presence of Christ" in worship?

7. Is there anything to be said for "closed Communion"? Are Protestants enough aware of the church as the body of Christ?

8. In the light of this chapter, discuss the meaning of Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Consider in connection with this the statement: "Where Christ is, there is the Church Universal" (Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans* 8:2).

9. How does the Christian use of Sunday show it to be a religion of the Spirit and not of the Law?

10. In what ways could the church service be more spiritual (i.e., more responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit)?



## CHAPTER IV

### CORPORATE (PUBLIC) WORSHIP

WE ARE NOW in a position to consider worship in its present-day manifestations. We turn, first, to the subject of corporate, or public, worship.

#### The Necessity of Public Worship

WITH ITS EMPHASIS on salvation by faith and the necessity for each person to be responsible for his own spiritual life, the tendency of Protestantism is to individualize worship. It is too often felt that one can worship God by himself and do it better than in a church. A little poem by Vera Wheatley expresses this thought:

I walked on the hilltop on Sunday, on Sunday,  
The bells pealed below me from valley and plain;  
I walked to gain courage for work-a-day Monday,  
To the hilltops, the lone lands, the bells called again.

Mayhap in the churches they prove Him, they prove Him,  
The preachers say one day their God we shall see—  
I see Him, I feel Him, I know Him, I love Him,  
When out on the hilltop God preaches to me.

And down in the churches the people, the people,  
Sit tightly in rows just like peas in a pod;  
“And, oh, you’re a heathen,” comes up from each steeple,  
“Who walk on the hilltop to commune with God!”

As we shall see, one may indeed worship God privately, but not as a substitute for worshiping him publicly. The poem is wrong to disparage corporate worship, and we have the word of scripture for it: “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, *not neglecting to meet together*, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another . . .” (Hebrews 10:24, 25).

Apparently, in the early church there were some who thought that they could go it alone in Christianity, and the warning is to us as well as to them that it cannot be done. It cannot be done in worship, as it cannot be done in any aspect of the Christian life.

Why cannot it be done? Because at the very heart of the Christian message is the idea of the kingdom of God. Jesus preached and taught constantly about the kingdom (Matthew 4:17; ch. 13), and died that the kingdom might be realized (Matthew 26:28-29; Luke 23:42). The church is properly understood as existing for the kingdom (Luke 12:32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Colossians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:5) and the Lord's Prayer contains a petition for the coming of the kingdom ("Thy kingdom come"). In the light of these facts it must be said that, while we are saved individually (Luke 15:7, 10, 24), no one is saved to himself or for his own sake alone. We are saved to the kingdom; we become members of the family of God; we, as Christians, assume obligations toward others, beginning with our own families (1 Timothy 5:8), and extending to the church and all men (Galatians 6:10), including the foreigner (Galatians 3:28) and even our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

No one can be a Christian and live by himself. In fact, there is no such thing as morality if it does not involve others, for there would be no Ten Commandments to break if there were no others to lie to, or steal from, or otherwise mistreat. To be good means to be in good relation to others, and we are saved in order to "become worthy members of Christ's holy church," as the Baptismal Service puts it. The Communion Service suggests the same thing in the General Invitation, "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and *are in love and charity with your neighbors* . . . draw near with faith." But nowhere is it more strongly put than Jesus does in his saying about forgiveness, "If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15). Our relation to God is measured by our relation to our fellow men.

All this is true because it is what God intended. After all, we are born into a family, and we grow up on relation to father

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and mother, brother and sister, friends and schoolmates. We discover what we are and what we can do as we compete or co-operate with others. We learn what are the limits of our rights and privileges as we adjust our lives to others. We find out what others do for us and what we can do for them. It is not too much to say that no one is fully himself until he finds himself in others. The secret of true success in life is not ability merely but the ability to get along with people, to give and take, to do one's part and to let the other fellow do his, maybe helping him but never dominating him or using him for one's own selfish ends. This is the essence of the Golden Rule which not only Jesus (Matthew 7:12) but other religious leaders have voiced in one form or another. The Golden Rule is not only good for others, but good for ourselves. It is the way we best realize what we are and what we can do.

We are therefore made for each other, and we are our best selves when we are in right relation to each other. Is it any wonder, then, that when we come to worship, it is important that we worship with each other? For God is the God of all men, and not the private Creator of any one of us; and God is the Father, in a special sense, of *all* who come to him through Christ. Have we a right to claim him by excluding others? Corporate worship is not an elective for the Christian life; it is (as Hebrews 10:25 suggests) a requirement. There are some things that we cannot know and cannot be until we worship together. It is not too much to say that unless we do so worship, we are not truly Christian.

There is, also, in corporate worship a power that is to be found nowhere else. This is suggested also by the text we have been quoting: ". . . not neglecting to meet together . . . but encouraging one another." No one fully understands the mystery of the human spirit and the unseen influence of person upon person, but there is something that transpires among people, when they get together, that is absent when the individual is alone. Thus intimate friends may sit in silence in a room, saying nothing, but feeling a contentedness that is real. Bereaved folk know about this when friends call and lend the comfort of their presence, if not of their words.



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If this is true of man's spirit, is it not more true of God's? We have the word of scripture for it: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). (It is significant that this verse occurs in a chapter of Matthew which deals with the church.) It is as if Christ would say to us, "It is possible together to have an experience of my Spirit that is not possible alone, precious though your fellowship with me may be in the privacy of your own room." This is not dissonant with the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:6. There Jesus is speaking against the Pharisaic love of display in prayer for the sake of human praise (Matthew 6:5), and against that Jesus counsels his followers to pray in secret in order to be heard of God only and to receive credit from him. We are all familiar with those who in a public prayer obviously have the congregation rather than God in mind. Even public prayer should be addressed to God alone. But the abuse of it is no argument against corporate worship, and Jesus himself gave his support to the latter by attending the synagogue "as his custom was" (Luke 4:16).

Is it possible to explain, in part at least, the power of public worship? Perhaps there are three reasons for this power. *First*, the most obvious, is the fact that public worship is usually held under circumstances that are conducive to the realization of God's presence. This is especially true when it takes place in a church building. The distractions of life are shut out: the noise of the street, the clamor of the marketplace, the ringing of the telephone or doorbell—all the insistent demands of this world. Voices are hushed in the sanctuary, where the architectural lines, the stained-glass windows, the cross, the communion table, the Bible, the music, unite to speak of God and his holy will.

But, above all, there is the single purpose on the part of all who are present, and the more sincere and intent this purpose is, the greater will be the effect on the individual who joins the congregation in worship. The difficulty of private worship is that it falls into disorganized reverie. In public worship attention is far less likely to wander. No wonder Martin Luther wrote: "At home in my own house there is no warmth or vigor in me, but in the church, when the multitude is gathered together, a

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fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through.”<sup>1</sup> Paul understood the power of corporate worship, when he wrote: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16).

*Second*, leadership, such as is necessary in public worship, provides a better chance of accomplishment than is usually possible to the individual who is left to his own devices. Even the leader, having to prepare, will obtain for himself in group worship what he cannot experience in his own private worship. This is not to disparage private worship which, as we shall see, is as necessary for the Christian life as is public worship, and capable of endless heights of achievement; it is simply to testify to common experience. Theoretically, private worship, properly conceived, could sustain itself indefinitely—and in the case of shut-ins does do so; but, practically, it depends upon periodic participation in public worship. In fact, the two are interdependent. What is insisted on here is that public worship customarily calls for a preparation and a discipline that enhance its worth, as compared with the less careful approach ordinarily made to private worship.

The value of the ministry in Protestantism is to be found primarily at this point. By his divine call, his native gifts, his training, the minister is especially equipped to lead in worship the congregation whose members may not on their own have as satisfactory an experience. Some time ago Willard L. Sperry testified: “A doctor in my Boston parish once said to me, ‘Your sermons are a great help to me because they say what I have always thought ought to be said, but never knew how to say.’” That admission of the worth of the minister in preaching would apply in most cases to his leadership in worship as a whole.

*Third*, public worship is characterized by sharing, which is possible in a group and practically impossible, except in an imaginative way, for the individual. The necessity of sharing is well put by Amiel who, after spending an evening in solitude

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<sup>1</sup> Coffin, H. S., *The Public Worship of God*, p. 19. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946.

with a book of philosophy, said: "Still I miss something, common worship, a positive religion, shared with other people . . . I cannot . . . content myself with being in the right all alone. I must have a less solitary Christianity."<sup>2</sup> When we worship together as the family of God, we can know the meaning of God the Father as in no other way. When we worship together as men, women, children, of all races, classes, conditions, heedless of what ordinarily divides mankind, we can know the meaning of brotherhood as in no other way.

Here, indeed, is the basic possibility of realizing the ideal of the kingdom of God. When men have worshiped as brothers, if their worship has been sincere, they are more likely to live as brothers. For the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts. "Beloved," (says 1 John 4:7-8) "let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love." It was the love of Christians for each other that impressed the opponents of early Christianity, and it must be the love of Christians for each other today which must make the similar impact upon the world. Where is this love more genuinely generated and more effectively sustained than in corporate worship?

### The Nature of Corporate Worship

With this understanding of the necessity of public worship, let us now turn to the nature of it. We have seen that many types of worship have come into being in the long course of Christian history. Christians today worship in accordance with the type in which they have been reared, or which they deliberately choose as best suited to their taste. It is not necessary for us to say here which type is best, nor would it be right to do so. Worship is essentially man's response to God and it is real when it results in the experience of God, the realization of God's presence. Any type of worship which accomplishes this end is the right type for the person who experiences it. Nevertheless, it is possible to say a few things that are true of all types of worship.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted by T. M. Badger, in an article, "Why Is Church Worship Necessary?" in *Shepherds*, September, 1954, p. 19.



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*First*, worship must be meaningful. If the forms and ceremonies in worship have no meaning for the worshiper, they are useless. Even if they are explained, they are useless to the worshiper to whom they are not real. All worship must be in terms of that which fits the experience of the worshiper. This does not mean that the worshiper cannot grow to appreciate forms of worship with which he is not initially familiar, or that he does not need to appreciate them. It does mean that if, like the Quaker, he wants none at all except the discipline of silence, he still can worship God, and must do so in a way which is meaningful for him.

*Second*, worship must be disciplined. Worship is at least paying attention to God and doing those things which contribute to giving God our attention. Ordinarily, this means some kind of progression through stages of appreciation until God becomes clear and compelling, and the worshiper goes away from the service with a feeling of having met God face to face.

*Third*, worship must be instructive. Paying attention to God involves ideas about God, and it is highly important that we worship the right kind of God. As we have seen, worship is universal among men, historically and geographically, but the gods men have worshiped have differed very much from each other. Even in Christian churches the notion of God has varied from person to person in the same congregation. Hence, the reading of the Scriptures as the revelation of God, and the sermon as their interpretation, form an important part of worship.

*Fourth*, worship must include communion. If God does not become so real that his presence is felt, then that service has failed of its purpose. Protestants rightly reject the idea that God-in-Christ is mediated by any physical means, even the elements of the Lord's Supper, but they do not reject the fact of communing with God. In whatever service—be it the communion-service or the preaching-service—or whenever in the service—the organ strains, the hymns, the anthem, the scripture, the prayer, the sermon, even the benediction—the worshiper has a sense of divine presence, he is truly worshipping.

*Fifth*, worship must offer forgiveness. Communion with God is not possible if the barrier of sin intervenes. Early in the service

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of worship there must be an opportunity to confess sin and to be assured of forgiveness, based on sincere repentance on the part of the worshiper. In the Roman Catholic Church this is separated from worship in the sacrament of penance, involving contrition, confession, absolution and satisfaction, but this is rejected by Protestantism. Calling upon the one Priest and Mediator, Jesus Christ, the Protestant confesses in his own heart his sins and repents of them, receiving the assurance of forgiveness from God himself through his Spirit. For the Methodist the classic expression of this is in words of John Wesley: "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." The opportunity for this experience is necessarily a part of every service of worship.

*Sixth*, worship must imply commitment. No one can truly worship God, unless he gives himself to God. The primitive idea of sacrifice was to give part of one's possessions to obtain something from the god. In Christianity, God provides the sacrifice to win us to himself (2 Corinthians 5:18-19), since we are unable to provide it for ourselves (Hebrews 10:4), and we appropriate that God-given sacrifice by faith (Hebrews 10:22), and in doing so give ourselves to God in appreciation (1 Corinthians 6:19b, 20a; Galatians 2:20; 1 John 4:16-19). Even if we consider the offering as the modern counterpart of the ancient sacrifice, it is a token of our stewardship, representing our time, talent, and money—all of which we dedicate to God (Romans 12:1).

No service of worship is complete if it does not call for commitment of life, and normally every service ends on this note. While it is historically incorrect to say that service begins when worship ends (for the word *service*, as we have seen, means the serving of God in worship), it is true that men enter to worship and depart to serve, and the one thing that makes possible such service is commitment in worship. That done, it is possible to say that men can worship God by serving their fellow men, though the service of one's fellow men can never be a substitute for worship.

*Seventh*, what of emotion in worship? Many Christians feel

that God has not made his presence felt unless the congregation is moved by his Spirit to an emotional response that lifts it to a new height of religious experience. They cite the experience of Pentecost (Acts, chapter 2) and the occasions when the Holy Spirit attested discipleship (Acts 2:38; 8:17; 10:44-45; 15:8; 19:6) and stimulated Christians (Acts 6:5; 7:55) and guided them (Acts 13:2; 15:28; 16:6) and gave them courage (Acts 4:8; 13:9) and joy (Acts 14:52; cf. Romans 14:17) and comfort (Acts 9:31). It can hardly be denied that the picture given in Acts, and reflected in the Epistles of the New Testament, is of a church in which God made himself known by the Spirit. Nor can it be denied that the pattern of Pentecost continued for some time in the services of the early Church. Such is the implication of Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians, chapters 12 to 14. It seems reasonable to assume that such manifestations of the Spirit were emotional rather than intellectual (1 Corinthians 14:19), and though Paul counseled that things be "done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40), he did not try to eliminate the emotional in the religious life of the Corinthians. Nor should we in ours.

There is room for the emotional in worship. It ought not simply to be labeled a relic of the frontier days in religion. Preachers need to preach with sincerity and conviction, their words intellectually justified but glowing with a faith emotionally kindled; and congregations need to respond with feeling and enthusiasm. Indeed, it is a good question whether the responses now formalized in liturgical worship were not originally the eager acclaims of the first Christian congregations, corresponding to the *Amens* and *Hallelujahs* of revivalistic days. It is said that in Chrysostom's church in Antioch, in the fourth century, the congregation even clapped their hands when his "golden-mouthed" preaching went home to their hearts. Emotion may well be listed as a *seventh* requirement for public worship. Without it the church is spiritually dead.

Historically speaking, there have been two general types of Christian worship; the temple type, involving sacrifice (the mass); and the synagogue type, involving scripture reading and preaching. As we have seen, the Roman Church emphasized the one;



the Protestant Church emphasized the other. As we look at worship today, it seems desirable to eliminate the distinction between them. One is implied in the other. The frequency with which the Lord's Supper is celebrated is not as important as that it should be observed and the sacrifice of Christ recalled as the means by which we are reconciled to God, and the benefits of communing with God in this way appropriated.

But the thought of Christ's sacrifice is not absent from the preaching-service, nor is appropriation of its benefits ignored there. Salvation by faith in Christ and what he did for us permeates all of Protestant worship. The Lord's Supper is indeed an ordinance of Christ. As Baptism is the sacrament by which we are inducted into the kingdom, the Lord's Supper is the sacrament by which we are kept in the kingdom, a constant reminder that we are not our own; we are bought with a price, a price paid by God, not by us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Many Protestants, we think, need to make much more of the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, we do not attribute to the Lord's Supper an experience of God different from the experience of God that is possible in the service of worship that does not include the Lord's Supper. The Christian experience of God is possible only to him who knows God through Christ and his cross. Therefore, all worship, whether by the Lord's Supper or the service or scripture and preaching, is true worship, and the Christian rejoices in God who in love bent from high heaven and gave himself to man in Christ that man might give himself to God in appreciation.

### **Preparation for Worship**

Let us bring this chapter to a close by briefly considering preparation for public worship. Modern life has played havoc with this. The day which from the beginning was used for Christian worship—the Day of Resurrection, the day when the Holy Spirit was given to the Church, the day of the sun made by the Church the Day of the Son (of God)—has been invaded by secular influences that have nearly wiped it out of the awareness of many Christians. Late Saturday-night parties make for late getting up on Sunday morning; Sunday afternoon is taken up

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with ball games or picnicking or visiting; Sunday evening is full of radio and television programs that excel in entertainment value; and the Christian conscience about Sunday (in America, at least) has just about died. Even what is left of Sunday morning is compromised by children's programs of the air and church services that are justification to some (who do not need to stay at home) to omit church attendance. Many who do go to church seem to want to be enticed there by theatrics in preaching or music or pageantry of one sort or another—although drama and dramatic music, properly conceived and reverently executed, are certainly a part of worship.

Is it not possible to be more conscientious about it all? Supposing that going to church were made a definite part of one's weekly program and adequate provision made for it, what would one do? Would he not be concerned to get up in ample time to be ready without undue rushing and excitement? In families where there are small children, this would call for special planning. Would not the morning radio be used judiciously, the kind of program being tuned in which is in keeping with the day? Would not the Bible be read and prayer be offered for God's blessing and guidance for pastor and people? As one entered the church, would he not want to be quiet and meditative, offering a private prayer as he is seated and then, perhaps, glancing through the Bible (which he might bring, or find provided) for a favorite bit of scripture, or leafing through the hymnal for some words of inspiration? (Certainly, it is no time for exchanging pleasantries with others or getting caught up on the news!) Would he not make the organ prelude a preparation of his spirit for worship, so that with the processional and the call to worship he would be fully prepared to participate? Having thus made his prior contributions, the worship service would be, almost inevitably, an encounter with God, and the worshiper would know, with a sureness that could not be denied, that God is real, and is one's strength for life and his joy for ever.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. With the aid of the church bulletin, examine the order of worship

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used in your church and classify the elements with respect to their function or contribution.

2. Are there any items in the order of worship which do not seem to be vital to you?

3. Are there any elements which could be added or changed and, in your opinion, make the service more meaningful?

4. Do you think the Lord's Supper should be observed more frequently, or less frequently, in your church? Why?

5. Looking into your own heart, do you find that your religious experience at the table of the Lord is different from your experience at the ordinary service of worship? In what way or ways?

6. What do you think you might do to make your preparation for worship more effective?

7. Can you recall the last time when the service in your church meant for you an experience of God?

8. Do you think the Sunday school is the place for worship? If so, in what departments, particularly? Is the worship effective?

9. Do you think the Sunday school should be a substitute for the service of worship in church? Should children be trained for church attendance?

10. Can emotion be introduced into the service without "destroying the spirit of worship"?



## CHAPTER V

### PRIVATE WORSHIP

NO MATTER HOW important the public expression of it, worship must have its private exercise. In fact, public worship implies and depends on private worship. Even the Roman Catholic Church with its elaborate liturgy of the mass encourages private devotions. The Eastern Orthodox Church permits "a worshiper to enter the building, secure a candle, go to the platform, light the candle and place it there as a symbol of the prayer he is offering to God, while the priest is chanting the liturgy. . . . The Roman priest not only permit(s) but encourage(s) the worshiper to offer his prayers in private devotions in the church while the priest is saying Mass."<sup>1</sup> It is most common on entering a Catholic church any time of the day to find worshipers praying in the pews. It is not too much to say that, whatever may be the worth of their devotions, the Catholic is a greater user of private prayer in church than is the Protestant. In any case, it is true that there is no public worship without private worship, and the people assemble in vain unless the worshipers are individually appropriating the service by private devotion and prayer.

The consideration of private worship falls naturally into two parts: personal devotions on the one hand, and family worship on the other. Let us look now at the first of these.

#### Personal Devotions

As already suggested, personal devotions will necessarily center in prayer. Indeed, prayer is the heart of all worship, for it is in prayer that God becomes real to us. It is in the prayer mood that we hear the call of God and in the prayer mood that we answer it. Prayer is the means by which we converse with God and have fellowship with him. There is no essential difference,

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<sup>1</sup> Byington, Edwin H., *The Quest for Experience in Worship*, p. 207. (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1929).

therefore, between the prayer of private worship and the prayer of public worship. The difference is to be found not in the essential experience but in the use to which prayer is put in each case. In public worship, prayer is part of an order of worship that includes other elements: hymns, anthem, scripture, offering, sermon; in private worship, prayer occupies a much larger place. In public worship, moreover, prayer is disciplined to the occasion, the pastoral prayer being concerned with the needs of the whole congregation and of the kingdom as the world-enterprise of the Church, and the other prayers being related to the theme of the service; but in private worship, prayer is likely to be concerned with individual and family needs. It can be very selfish, like that which says: "God bless me and my wife, my son John and his wife, us four and no more. Amen." It can be very immature, hardly getting beyond the "Now I lay me down to sleep," taught in childhood. It can be very materialistic, being liberally sprinkled with requests for benefits of one kind or another ("Give me this. . . . Grant me that. . . . Let me succeed. . . . Don't let it rain. . . . Protect me from harm. . . . Make me well. . . . Help me out of this trouble. . . . Perform a miracle for my benefit"). There is surely nothing wrong in voicing one's needs before God, and we are assured by Jesus of God's interest in our needs (Matthew 6:8). But asking for things is only a part of prayer, as we learn from the Lord's Prayer itself, and prayer which is nothing but asking is not worship. Worship is appreciation of God, and the prayer of private worship must be something more than a "gim-me" prayer.

Suppose we take the Lord's Prayer as the pattern of praying. The beauty of it is that it combines the prayer of worship with the prayer of need, and is consequently the model of all perfect praying. It was not intended by Jesus to be a substitute for our own prayers, nor to be used as a purely formal "Our-Father" in a ritualistic observance, but as an example of what we ourselves could do (see Matthew 6:9, "Pray then like this . . ."). When we examine it, we find it to contain the following elements:

The Primacy of God—"Our Father who art in heaven"  
 Reverence for God—"Hallowed by thy name"

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Desiring of God—"Thy kingdom come" (see Matthew 6:33)

Obedience of God—"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"

The Voicing of Need—"Give us this day our daily bread"

### The Relating of Self

to God—"Forgive us our trespasses"

to Others—"as we forgive those who trespass against us"

to the Future—"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"

Consummation in God—"For thine is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory. Amen" In the Lord's Prayer we find human need recognized, but we see it set within the context of God's will, in view of God's greatness and the anticipation of his triumph. Such praying for one's needs is worshipful prayer, for the self is constantly seen in relation to God (and others) and God is ever appreciated. If one prays in this way, in the precise order revealed in the Lord's Prayer, he will always be worshipping. Worship in prayer is simply the realization of God.

While prayer is the heart of worship, both public and private, there are other aids which are valuable and important, perhaps indispensable. Chief among these is the devotional reading of the Bible. This is to be distinguished from Bible study as such. Knowing about the Bible and being familiar with its contents is one thing; the devotional use of the Bible is something more. One cannot know too much about the Bible, or be too well acquainted with its contents; but if the Bible is to be devotionally helpful, it must be appropriated as the Word of God. Personal application must be made of the truths contained within it; its promises must be accepted in faith, believing; its words must come alive with the Spirit of God; it must be, in short, the means of an encounter with God. One may know little about the Bible and find God in it; one may know much about the Bible and never find God there. In private worship one must read the Bible without apology for the purpose of finding God, and God will indeed speak to him out of its pages.

Another aid to private worship is the hymnbook, or, for that matter, a book of devotional poetry or prose. There is nothing



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outside the Bible so nearly inspired as the hymns and songs which, through the years, have found acceptance among Christian people. The poets, too, both old and new, often voice what one feels and cannot express. When he finds it said well in a poem, or a bit of prose, it gives release to something within him, and the surge of feeling that accompanies the expression is the veritable blessing of God.

Still another aid to personal devotions is the private altar, or worship center, which some people like to have somewhere in their homes. A common arrangement is to have a table or a shelf on which is placed a cross, flanked, perhaps, with candles. Before the cross may be an open Bible and behind and above it an artist's painting of Christ. Sometimes a kneeling stool is placed before the setting. To many, all this may be too formalistic, and it must be agreed that sitting in a rocking chair with an open Bible in the lap will do quite as well if the spirit of worship is present. Still, there is something appealing about the cross—it symbolizes so much—and the very sight of it can start a chain of worshipful thoughts that can be a blessing indeed.

Mention was made in the last chapter of worshiping God on a hilltop. Of course, this can be done. Nature offers many scenes that inspire the worshipful mood, as the study of primitive religion, which was so full of nature worship, abundantly shows. Yet one must bring to nature the right idea of God and the mood to find God. Not everybody who loves nature loves God. Not everybody who knows nature knows God. Wordsworth speaks of a Peter Bell who was indifferent to God in the midst of nature's glory:

A yellow primrose by a river's brim  
A yellow primrose was to him,  
And it was nothing more. . . .

Tennyson, on the contrary, found a flower in the crack of a wall and also found God:

Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies;—

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Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,  
Little flower—but if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.

Worship is not “out there,” in any *thing*; worship is within us. We may invest something external with meaning, but it is only because God has spoken to us in our hearts and given us the meaning with which we see what lies all around us. Masfield expresses this well in his narrative poem, “The Everlasting Mercy.” Saul Kane has been converted and everything looks better to him afterwards:

The station brook, to my new eyes,  
Was babbling out of Paradise;  
The waters rushing from the rain  
Were singing, “Christ has risen again!”

In his “Dialogue with Nature,” St. Augustine brings out the same truth. “I asked the earth, and it said, ‘I am not He,’ and all that is upon it made the same confession. I asked the sea, and the depths, and the creeping things that have life, and they answered, ‘We are not thy God; look thou above us.’ I asked the breezes and the gales, and the whole air with its inhabitants said to me, ‘Thou art in error; I am not God.’ I asked the heaven, the sun, the moon, the stars. ‘We too,’ said they, ‘are not He whom thou seekest.’ And I said to all the creatures that surround the doors of my fleshly senses: ‘Ye have said to me of my God that ye are not He. Tell me somewhat of Him.’ And with a great voice they exclaimed, ‘He made us!’”<sup>2</sup> That Augustine is right is proved by those who have looked at nature and found nothing to encourage. A girl, dying of consumption, spoke of the friendless hills (but contrast Psalm 121:1, 2). Another sufferer spoke of the stars as the eyes of hungry wolves (but contrast Isaiah 40:26).

But Robert Grant, the poet, sings:

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Leslie D. Weatherhead in *Jesus and Ourselves*, p. 102.

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Lord of earth, Thy forming hand  
Well this beauteous frame hath planned,  
Woods that wave and hills that tower,  
Ocean rolling in his power.  
Yet, amidst this scene so fair,  
Should I cease Thy smile to share,  
What were all its joys to me?  
Whom have I on earth but thee?

Worship begins and ends in God. And God makes himself known to us on *our own* level, the human. He speaks to us in the Bible, in Christ, in life, and we know him for what he is, our Heavenly Father. *Then* we can worship him in what he has made, because we will know the One behind what is made. Christianity can never be a nature worship, but Christians can worship God in nature.

And the Christian can worship God in people. Perhaps this lies at the bottom of the Roman Catholic veneration of the saints. Protestants cannot tolerate the idea of praying to saints and crediting them with the power to do what belongs to God; but all of us know people who are an inspiration, whom we want to call Christlike, who, in our contact with them, are a great help to our Christian living. Some of these people may have been instrumental to our conversion, and we gladly acknowledge that they are "full of the Holy Spirit" (cf. Acts 6:3, 5, 8; 7:55; 11:24). Sometimes individual acts of people, who are not conspicuously good, fill us with sudden inspiration. Browning tells of the song of a factory girl called Pippa and the good it does to those who hear it. Tales of heroism are always moving. Patience and fortitude in daily life find illustration in many lives all around us.

We can learn from almost anybody at any time, as the man did who saw a little girl carrying a big boy and asked her, "Isn't he heavy?" "No," she replied; "you see, he's my brother!" What a wealth of meaning in a statement that meant simple duty to the one who made it! In all these human situations we find God revealed in the goodness of life, the life he made, the life that can be so noble if it will, the life that is made not for time but for eternity. If one will, he can worship God at such times of



inspiration. We can have an experience of God in the midst of human experience.

Private worship, then, does not depend upon time and place. It is possible wherever God is found; it is as immediate as the mood that would find God; it is as real as the prayer that makes contact with God. It is not a substitute for public worship. It needs public worship to keep it disciplined, to keep it in touch with the church as the fellowship of the redeemed, to keep it related to the kingdom of God which is the family of the Heavenly Father.

But private worship is essential, for without it public worship cannot be made individual and the Christian cannot grow into what God desires of him as a person. Let there be habits of private worship. Let there be times for Bible reading and prayer and meditation on God's Word. But let private worship also be spontaneous; the sudden, swift moving of the spirit of man by the Spirit of God, anytime, anywhere. The joy of Christian living is the joy of knowing God, and that joy comes to each of us sooner or later.

### Family Devotions

The second aspect of private worship has to do with family devotions. In the beginning, before there was a temple and a priesthood, the father (or head of the family) was the family priest. So it was with the tribe whose chief was the priest, or with the nation whose king was the priest. We read in the Bible of how Abraham built altars and "called on the name of the Lord" on behalf of his company (Genesis 12:7-8; 13:4). David the king offered sacrifices in connection with bringing the ark to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:13-14, 17-19); Solomon presented sacrifices at Gibeon and had his vision (1 Kings 3:4-5); Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:32), Manasseh and Amon (2 Chronicles 33:22), though wicked kings, offered sacrifices as heads of the nation.

When the priesthood became established, the sacrificial function was taken away from the king, but in one conspicuous case the religion of Israel preserved the priestly function of the head of the family, namely, the celebration of the Passover. For this

the father of the family (or head of the "company"—cf. Jesus and his disciples) procured a lamb, killed it in the temple, gave the blood in a bowl to the priest to pour on the altar, took it home to roast as directed and to serve with bitter herbs, unleavened bread and diluted wine at a feast held in the home in connection with which the head of the family offered prayers and directed the ritual. Since the Passover was the chief of the Jewish feasts and the one required of the Jew to attend in Jerusalem, if he could attend no other, it will be seen how deeply implanted in family life Jewish religion was. It is so to this day.

Since the Passover came over into Christianity as the Lord's Supper, family worship is the heritage of Christians as well as of Jews. To be sure, the Lord's Supper was apparently celebrated in church units, but the first churches met in homes anyway (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 12:12; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2) and had a family flavor. The head of the family was expected to manage his own household (1 Timothy 3:5), provide for his family (1 Timothy 5:8), lead his household into faith (Acts 11:14; 16:31). Family religion is implied in these considerations, and it would be surprising, the father in these days having the authority he did, if the head of the family were not the arbiter of the family's religious destiny.

Today family life has largely broken down, and it is a serious matter for Christianity. The family is still important in religion. The influence of the home is still the greatest single influence in life. Attitudes inculcated by the home are those which are permanent in life, even if these attitudes are implanted in the very early pre-school years. Though schooling is important and church training is of worth, neither school nor church can compare with the home as the determining factor in a person's life. Without the co-operation of the home, therefore, Christianity has small hope of success.

This points up the importance of worship in today's home. Consider the child's notion of God. It is bound to be affected by the home environment. A Sunday-school teacher once said to her small children, "Let us bow our heads and shut our eyes and pray to our Father who is in heaven." One little tot spoke up, "My

father isn't in heaven; he's home in bed." It is hard to introduce a good God to children with bad fathers and mothers. It is testimony to the worth of Joseph that Jesus could use the word "father" so intimately of God; there could have been no hindrance in what he learned, as a boy, from and of his earthly parent. This is vital because there is no other word to use for God which is more adequate than that of father, or parent. Our homes must somehow measure up to the challenge presented by the demand of the Christian faith for that kind of living and that kind of worshiping in the home which will convey to youthful minds the right kind of belief and experience of God.

What, then, can the home offer as its contribution to the experience of worship? Bearing in mind that worship is basically the response to God, the home may do anything that proves effective in helping individuals in the family and the family as a whole to know and experience God. Parents will naturally teach their children prayers and how to pray, and talk to them of God, being alert for any signs of a response to God. There is no telling how soon in life God may be real for the growing mind and heart; and one of the most important functions of a parent must be to prepare the way for the work of the Holy Spirit.

Since our knowledge of God is determined by what the Bible tells us of the divine revelation, it is important that the Bible be used in the home. This will begin with the more familiar Bible verses and stories, though not used indiscriminately. They should be graded to the level of the understanding and used for their religious value. Some stories, though properly a part of the Bible, may even be upsetting and harmful to very young children. Such might be the stories of Cain and Abel, the Flood, Samson and Delilah, David and Goliath, Herod's Slaughter of the Infants, Jesus' Crucifixion. Miracle stories, also, may be unwholesome if they are used only to arouse false expectations. What is needed is some understanding of God in terms of his loving care, his leading of the people, his demand for righteousness, his patience at human wilfulness, his sacrifice for sin, his promise of deliverance from suffering and death, his approachableness in prayer. The day comes, finally, when the Bible can be read and studied in its



entirety for its own sake, but in the training of children and in family worship it should be used judiciously and purposefully.

Specifically, the Bible passages used in the various departments in the church school literature should be noted and re-used at home. Special helps, wisely chosen, may be employed in teaching the Bible to children. Children should be encouraged to read and know as much of the Bible as possible, not only for its content but as a means of grace. They should be encouraged to think about the meaning of what they have read, and then to pray that God will speak to them through the Bible passage. The passages should be marked in their own Bibles, that they may know where they are and how they can find them again. A good plan would be to read the last passage before reading a new one, so that, by double contact, acquaintance may quickly become familiarity and friendship. The Bible is the Word of God as it is known and as it becomes, through use, the means by which God speaks to us.

What of family prayers? This observance, once so universal in Christian homes, needs a larger use. It should begin at marriage, the newly-weds reading the Bible and praying together every morning or night. The danger, perhaps, is when the children are small and demand attention at the time when family prayers are held. Once interrupted, the observance is hard to re-establish. Only a deep belief that it is necessary and that the family must worship as a unit will serve to keep family prayers going.

What is done at family prayers? The Bible is read, prayer is offered, the Lord's Prayer is said. That basic pattern can be enlarged at will. Many like to use a devotional publication like *The Upper Room* which offers also a text and a brief meditation. Others like to use a Bible book and read it through consecutively. The writer's father, a missionary, loved the Book of Acts, and family worship reverted to it again and again, though some of the speeches in Acts would occasionally be omitted in favor of the thrilling narrative! The time in that family for worship was just before breakfast, though many families will prefer the less hurried time after the evening meal. But the radio and television offer competition then, as at almost any time of the day, and it will be necessary to be determined about the matter if family prayers are to be observed.

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Grace at table is a form of family worship. It can and should be done individually, but as a family observance it has a satisfying significance. Quite often the youngest member of the family is taught a prayer to say at meals, and this sometimes becomes an empty formality, the prayer being rattled off without thinking. Sometimes the head of the family says a formal prayer that is never varied. It would be better if the responsibility were shared, every member of the family who can taking his turn, and saying, if possible, in his own words what is felt. All that is needed, basically, is a simple "Thank you," said with a sense of God's reality and presence. The mood of devotion can characterize every time grace is said at meals.

There are special occasions when family worship can be significantly helpful. A new home ought always to be dedicated with family worship, and for this purpose The Methodist Church provides an order of dedication. But a simple form of prayer, said by the head of the family or by each one, will do. When a member of the family leaves on a trip, or the boy or girl goes away to college, or to the service of the country or as a missionary, it ought to be an occasion for family notice before God in prayer and devotion. God can be invoked as the One whose loving care embraces all who belong to him wherever they are, and keeps them true to the real values of life. At times of sickness, prayer may be used by the family, and not left entirely to the visiting minister—a simple prayer for God's strengthening grace for the trials of illness and commitment to him for the outcome within his holy will. When death enters the home, the family might well gather for the reading of God's Word and prayer for comfort and assurance in the face of what he alone has power to order and to do.

Indeed, there is not an area of life that worship does not touch in some form; and since so much of our real lives are lived at home or in contact with the family, worship that answers to human needs is bound to be family worship in very large measure. When it is absent from the home, it is absent from much of life. In fact, if worship does begin at home, it is not likely to be vital anywhere. For this reason, family worship may be carried abroad, and no finer expression of this can be found than when the whole

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family goes to church in a body and sits together in the sanctuary. Here, in a visible and significant way, home and church are drawn together and both unite as a witness to the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. For, as the home is the basic unit of human fellowship on earth, so the church is the basic unit of human fellowship in heaven, being the anticipation on earth of the kingdom of God, who as the universal Father embraces in his love all the families of mankind. To worship our Heavenly Father in the family and in church is to realize God's ultimate purpose for the world.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What can be done in Protestantism to encourage private worship in connection with public worship?
2. Is it possible to make our prayers more disciplined without destroying their spontaneity or their intimacy?
3. Is it worthwhile to keep a devotional scrapbook, or a devotional diary? How about marking up one's Bible? Is one's spiritual life to be taken seriously enough to record progress in it?
4. Is it possible by family worship to encourage a religious experience on the part of growing children? What are the signs of a growing awareness of God? Consider Luke 2:41-51.
5. In what ways can family attendance at church be encouraged? Could there be Whole-Family-in-Church days?
6. How can the home co-operate more effectively with the church school in the religious growth of children?



## CHAPTER VI

### WORSHIP AND OTHERS

SINCE WORSHIP BRINGS us into contact with God, one of its inevitable results is the ennobling of our human lives. We are no longer mere creatures of the dust. We are aware of our relation to God our Creator, in whom we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28.) We see ourselves in a new perspective because we see ourselves in relation to God. We can no longer think meanly of ourselves, neither with respect to our origin, nor our present existence, nor our destiny. From God we come, by God we live, unto God we go. Worship keeps us alive to this fundamental truth concerning what we really are.

What worship does for us, it also does for all men. The dignity it bestows upon us individually, it bestows upon the whole human race; for we are all equally the children of God, none intrinsically better than any other. Those of us who call ourselves Christian are aware of what God has done for us in Christ. We have accepted the salvation which God has provided and become members of God's family of the redeemed. But "God so loved the *world* that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16), and in the eyes of God every one of his human children is equally precious with every other (Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9). It is his desire that *all* should accept his love and be members of his chosen family. If we worship the Christian God, we are intensely aware of this in our devotional life.

The difficulty is that the tendency in human life is to be self-concerned. When we are born into this world, helpless and dependent, we are of necessity so much the concern of our parents that our first reasonings tend to make us individually the center of everything. If our parents are wise, they will counter this inevitable tendency by teaching us to share with others, and help with the work, and be but one of the several members of the family. Joseph Fort Newton put this beautifully in a poem:

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It takes a father and a mother, two men and God  
To make a brother,  
And show him the truth no one may know alone  
Or teach another.  
The truth of God that makes us glad and free  
Is learned together  
On land and sea, in joy and woe, in sunny days  
And stormy weather.

As we grow up, our parents take us to Sunday school where we learn to play together in God's House, the first important lesson that can be taught a child, an extremely important lesson for the child who may be the only one at home. We go to school and there enlarge our knowledge of what our lives mean in relation to others. We learn by experience to take second place graciously and first place gracefully, knowing that in a group someone must be second at one time or another, and that anyone is first only because there is somebody to be second. We find that we cannot live without recognizing our dependence upon others, and our responsibility to others. This is the lesson everyone must learn who hopes to make a success of life.

It is a lesson that lies at the heart of Christian worship. It is not only true of public worship, as we have seen, but also of private worship. In his beautiful prose poem, Walter Rauschenbush brings this out emphatically:

In the castle of my soul  
Is a little postern gate,  
Whereat, when I enter,  
I am in the Presence of God.  
In a moment, in the turning of a thought,  
I am where God is.  
This is a fact.

. . . . .

When I am in the consciousness of God,  
My fellow men are not far off and forgotten,  
But close and strangely dear.  
Those whom I love  
Have a mystic value.

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They shine as if a light were glowing  
Within them.

It is impossible to worship the Christian God, even in the privacy of one's inner chamber, and not have "the windows of the soul" open upon the world (cf. Daniel 6:10). William Carey, before he became the great pioneer missionary, would cobble shoes in his shop before a map of the world toward whose people his heart yearned in prayer. Our God will not let us be selfish. Our God will not let us go without a sense of responsibility for others. If we can worship and still be selfish and unconcerned and irresponsible, then it may be questioned whether we have been worshiping the Christian God or some other. For we are made by the kind of God we worship. If he is the God of Christ, then we are Christian people who care, and the prayer of Miriam Teichnor becomes our prayer:

God, let me be aware!  
Stab my soul fiercely with another's pain;  
Let me walk, seeing horror and stain;  
Let my hands, groping, find other hands;  
Give me the heart that divines, understands;  
Give me the courage, wounded, to fight;  
Flood me with knowledge, drench me with light;  
Please keep me eager just to do my share;  
God, let me be aware!

Specifically, Christian worship will do three things for us in our relation to others. *First, we will love all because we love God.* The New Testament is quite uncompromising about this, "If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). The point here is that the Christian God is to be understood in terms of brotherly love, and the Christian moves from the human experience of it to the understanding of God as love. But this understanding of God impels more brotherly love: "This commandment we have



from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:21).

Jesus enjoins the same thought in his teaching about forgiveness. "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15-16). This is to say that the unforgiving person cannot even understand the forgiving God, much less receive forgiveness from him. As we have said before, our relation to God is measured by our relation to our fellow men. Jesus also goes on to point out that if we believe in a God of forgiveness, then we are impelled to forgive. He advises Peter to forgive "seventy times seven" and then tells the story of the servant who was forgiven a fantastic sum by his lord but could not forgive a picayune debt owed by a fellow servant (Matthew 18:21-35). The Christian is a man in bonds to his fellow men because he is a man in debt to God for his grace. "We love, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Every time we pray truly we know this over again.

*Second, we will serve all because we serve God.* "Brethren, do not be weary in well-doing, says the Apostle Paul in two places (2 Thessalonians 3:13; Galatians 6:9); but that is precisely the problem of those who are dedicated to a life of service. How can one serve his fellow men when, perhaps, there is no incentive in the service itself; when, it may be, it has become a deadening routine or a distasteful chore; when, worst of all, it is not appreciated by those being served? The answer is not found in man at all, but in God. It is when one serves man for God's sake that he can be unwearied in well-doing. The strength for such service is found in worship.

It is significant that the Apostle Paul, who spoke of his "anxiety for all the churches" (by which he meant such tribulations as the church at Corinth gave him) and listed his sufferings (five lashings, three beatings, one stoning, three shipwrecks, and all the rest—far exceeding anything told of him in Acts), spoke also in the same epistle of being caught up to the third heaven in an inexpressible experience of God, by which he was assured of divine sustenance in weakness, grace sufficient for every need,

and the resting upon him of the power of Christ (see 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 and 11:24-29). It was worship that kept Paul serving.

*Third, we will be identified with all because we are identified with God.* As we have seen, communists, in effect, worship the state, and their concern is with the state. Whether we like it or not, communists have an impressive record of selflessness and sacrifice to the state, even to the point of abject self-abasement when found guilty (by their own reckoning) of faithlessness to the state. Communists, and all totalitarians, are made by the god they worship, even though the god is man-made. The sobering question is, "Are Christians as effectively made by the God they worship, even though their God is the Father of the Lord Jesus?" Are Christians as concerned as devotion to their God calls for? Do we care for the *last* and the *least* and the *lost* as did Jesus, who identified himself with them and said that as we served them we were serving him (see Matthew 25:34-36)? If we do not care that much, there is only one way we can; and if we do, there is only one way we can maintain our attitude—and that way is through worship: devotion to the God who demands this, fellowship in prayer with the God who can sustain this in our lives.

Nietzsche, the brilliant evil genius of German philosophy, whose spirit stimulated his countrymen in two world wars, rejected Christian love as weakness and railed at Christian morality. But, being the son of a minister, he could not shake off his Christian heritage entirely, and it may be that he bared his real complaint against Christianity in the words: "They [Christians] should sing better hymns, then I would believe in their Redeemer; his disciples should look more like redeemed people."<sup>1</sup> Was not that essentially what Gandhi was asking for when, turned away from a Christian church in South Africa because his skin was black, he turned back to Hinduism for the rest of his life? He might have become a Christian if Christians had been more Christian. As it was, he gave a more impressive demonstration of Christianity as a Hindu who read the New Testament than the vast majority of Christians do to this day. This is the

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Martin Dibelius, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 12.

tragedy of Christianity. Can it be due to the fact that Christians do not worship as they ought? They worship, but they do not worship aright.

There are several applications of the general truths we have been considering, but let us mention only two: evangelism and missions. Certainly, worship has its vital contribution to make to both.

What is EVANGELISM? Evangelism is primarily the concern that others share the experience that one himself enjoys in Christ. So conceived, it would be impossible for the Christian to worship without having the evangelistic impulse and desire. The closer one is to God's love in Christ, the more he yearns for those who know nothing of it. The Apostle Paul brings his great Epistle to the Romans to a climax in the eighth chapter by exclaiming: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . I am sure that neither death, nor life . . . nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:35, 38-39). Then he turns immediately to his fellow Jews, and opens the ninth chapter by saying, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were *accursed and cut off* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race" (9:2-3).

So badly does Paul want for his own race the experience of God's love in Christ that he himself is willing to give it up if it is the price he must pay! See what is happening here. The experienced love of God so intensifies the Christian's love for others that he is willing to sacrifice himself in evangelistic zeal! Nor is this desire of Paul confined to fellow Jews. In writing to the Philippians, a Gentile church (in whose community there was not even a Jewish synagogue (Acts 16:13) Paul says, "God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:8). Notice how Paul invokes God. Notice in Romans how, again and again, Paul inserts little doxologies and ascriptions to God in connection with his exposition, two of them in connection with the evangelization of the Jews (Romans 9:5; 11:33-36. Cf. also 1:25; 6:17; 7:25; 9:20; 14:11; 15:7; 16:25-27).



It is the thought of God; it is the glory of God; it is the wisdom and sovereignty of God; it is the worship of God as he is understood in Christ that animates Paul in everything and impels him to be the great apostle that he is, mediating the gospel to Jew and Greek alike (Romans 1:16-17).

Before there can be any evangelism, more important than any technique of evangelism, must be an intense love for others, an unquenchable desire for all one's fellow humans to belong to God in Christ. The passion of Paul must be our passion. The cry of John Knox ("God, give me Scotland or I die!") must, in equivalent form, be the cry of every Christian. The feeling of John Wesley ("The world is my parish") must be the feeling of every follower of Jesus. Christians cannot shut their hearts to the world's need of Christ. But if they open their hearts, if they keep them open, it will be because in their worship of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus the love of God has melted away all their animosity, all their indifference, and left only a concern like that of Christ who saw the multitudes and had compassion on them, "Because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34).

There is no essential difference between the rôle worship plays in EVANGELISM and that which it has in MISSIONS, for there is no essential difference between evangelism and missions. If evangelism is concern that others share the experience that the Christian has in Christ, then missions are simply the extension of this concern to all people, at home and abroad. It is amazing that any Christian can worship the Christian God and not believe in missions. There may well be differences of opinion concerning mission areas or techniques, missionary budgets and appropriations, missionaries and missionary secretaries, denominational missions or interdenominational missions. It may be questioned whether the troubled world in which we find ourselves does not call for still newer missionary approaches (and much change has already taken place in this area). It is certainly true that missions must be divested of even the suggestion of nationalism or imperialism. But the basic idea of missions is so fundamentally Christian that it is surely unthinkable that one

could worship the Christian God and not agree with it. God, who so loved the world that he gave his only Son, could not be worshiped in any genuine experience of him that would exclude commitment to his program of world evangelism.

The chief function of worship in relation to missions may well be to prevent missions from becoming simply a busy enterprise and keep it the essentially religious thing it is: the outreach of God's love through his servants, the missionaries, to all the world. We need all kinds of missionaries these days: doctors, nurses, agriculturists, linguists, economists, sociologists, engineers—indeed, almost the whole range of the occupations—as well as evangelists, preachers, teachers. But missions cannot merely professionalize. The spirit of evangelism must permeate all mission activity. The passion for souls, the desire to win men to God in Christ, must be the chief aim in all that is done. Worship must permeate all who are connected with missions: Those at home who work for missions, those who go out as missionaries, those who receive the benefits of mission activities. Social service in the name of Christ is unquestionably needful, and the ministry of healing, motivated by Christ's spirit, is a basic necessity, but missions fall short of their purpose if they do not get across the message of God's love in Christ and do not bring receivers of that message to the experience of God in Christ.

Worship, therefore, is essential to missions with respect to both their motive and their operation. This is beautifully illustrated in a story told by Albert Schweitzer himself of his work among the natives of Africa:

The operation is finished, and in the hardly lighted dormitory I watch for the sick man's awakening. Scarcely has he recovered consciousness when he stares about him and ejaculates again and again: "I have no more pain! I have no more pain! . . . His hand feels for mine and will not let it go. Then I begin to tell him and the others who are in the room that it is the Lord Jesus who has told the doctor and his wife to come to the Ogowe, and that white people in Europe give them the money to live here and cure sick negroes. Then I have to answer questions as to who these white people are, where they live, and how they know that the natives suffer so much from sickness. The African sun is shining through

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the coffee bushes into the dark shed, but we, black and white sit side by side and feel that we know by experience the meaning of the words: "All ye are brethren" (Matthew 23:8).<sup>2</sup>

Surely, in this experience of human sharing of the spirit of Jesus, though one man is black and the other white, though one is sick and the other well, though one is helpless and the other is his helper, there is a realization of the Christian God in the genuine response of worship.

The churchman who worships the Christian God will never despise his fellow men. On the contrary, he will make them increasingly a part of his life as he himself enters increasingly into the meaning and experience of Christian worship. As Jesus put it, thinking of the new convert (who might be any one of God's humble children), "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10).

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider Acts 17:16-34 as a study of the influence of worship, Christian and non-Christian. (Did the "altar to an unknown god" produce the attitude recorded in 17:21, or *vice versa*?)

2. What other examples can you think of that illustrate wrong attitudes produced by wrong worship? (Think of the worship of money, beauty, success, popularity, etc.)

3. Are Christians generally aware of the implications of the worship of the Christian God? How can they be made more aware of them?

4. Is worship a preparation for evangelism, or is the evangelistic service itself a service of worship? Or, is evangelism a necessary part of every worship service?

5. Do you think there is any difference in the actual experience of worship between the various races?

6. If one is a shut-in, can worship help to keep open "the windows of the soul" toward the world? How can this be true? What can shut-ins do for others? How about intercessory prayer?

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<sup>2</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, p. 93 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931).



## CHAPTER VII

### WORSHIP AND WORK

THERE IS A common misunderstanding of worship which regards it as something for impractical dreamers and not for hard-headed workers; for the Marys of this world and not for the Marthas (see Luke 10:38-42). One man said of his brother, a minister, in relation to meeting the needs of their mother: "He can do the praying; I'll do the paying." Humanity is often divided into the prayers and the payers; the meditative and the active; the worshippers and the workers. For many, worship and work do not go together.

#### How True Is This?

But is it true? A man is still a person when he goes to work. He cannot leave his human nature at home when he travels to the factory or the office, there to earn his daily bread. In fact, it has been found that the recognition of the person pays dividends in better and more productive work, so that industries today frequently take the trouble to understand their employees in terms of their psychological and social background. It is a commonplace now to recognize that a man who has trouble at home will be inefficient at the lathe, that worry interferes with work, that a bereavement will cut into production, that lack of purpose in life will make a worker shiftless and unreliable. A man is a human being wherever he goes and whatever he does. And as a human being, he has a spiritual nature too.

Moreover, work cannot be the totality of what one does. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," is the way the familiar proverb puts it. Some people try to make work their whole life, but they pay for it in undeveloped personalities and frustrated desires. One must also play. One must have a social life. One must think, for he has a mind to satisfy; and one must love, for he has a heart with its demands. And one must worship, for there is that within him which hungers for God; and he is

strangely ill at ease when he makes no contact with the Source and Sustenance and Security of his being. If one wants to be a complete person, then he must work and play, have friends and have thoughts, and worship the God from whom he comes, by whom he is sustained, and unto whom he goes. Life will not be content with less than this.

### The Essential Relation

But what essential relation does worship have to work? Is there any special reason to connect the two? Yes, for they complement each other. Worship takes seriously the God who gave us life; work takes seriously our place in life. When we worship, we look to him who makes it possible for us to be here and gives us our talents for service; when we work we look to ourselves and what we can accomplish in this world. We must do both. If we only look "above" and keep our hands folded in worship, we neglect our responsibility in life, and that is wrong. If we only look "around" to see what we can do and just keep ourselves busy, we lose the significance of life, and that is wrong. Life finds its meaning in worship, and its fulfillment in work. The one is as necessary as the other, and each calls for the other. A man who truly worships will want to work in order to justify his existence as a child of God; and a man who works will want to worship in order to realize his existence as a human being and not a machine. Worship and work—they complement each other.

They also provide a helpful alternation in living. The principle of alternation is important in life. Albert Schweitzer has practiced it to a marked degree in his remarkable career, combining different activities in his phenomenal life as theologian, philosopher, musician, doctor, missionary. He will begin a typical day with a session at his piano with its pedal attachments (for his chosen instrument is the organ); then he will turn to his hospital work, not infrequently mixing in physical labor when there is need; and at night he will write in his primitive study there at his mission station in the "primeval forest." He keeps himself fresh on all his activities by bringing into play the complementary parts of his make-up. He even divided his life into two alternate parts,

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devoting the first thirty years of his existence primarily to science and art, and now the remainder of it to the direct service of humanity. But it is his day-by-day experience with its division of labor that keeps him so productive. One who called on him when he was in Europe on a visit said:

"When you see Schweitzer in his home, the impression he makes on you is one of boundless energy. . . . As I listened to his incisive comments on present-day philosophers, watched his intense concentration during his waking hours, saw his ability to rest by diverting his mind from theology to music or medicine, I felt the tremendous driving power resident in him."<sup>1</sup>

In a letter written from Africa to a friend, Schweitzer himself testifies to the way he works:

"You want me to take a vacation, but for many reasons that is impossible. When I return from the holiday, so many things would not have been done. I would find on my desk a mountain of correspondence, building repairs, and other things waiting to be attended to. If the hospital is to function normally, I must be in my place every day, for there are too few of us. I have to do other jobs besides those of a doctor. . . . But when I am a doctor, or when I study the organ, or when I work at philosophy during the night, I forget all these humdrum tasks."<sup>2</sup>

The alternation of worship and work was a commonplace principle in the monasteries of medieval Christianity and in the lives of many mystics. Indeed, the motto of monasticism in the West was, "To work is to pray." Thus it was that the monasteries preserved civilization through the Dark Ages, for the monks were not only tillers of the soil, but they copied and illustrated manuscripts, taught neighboring youth in their schools, and themselves produced the only literature Europe had for some centuries. They also cared for the poor and suffering, and the monasteries were for many years the only almshouses, inns, asylums and hospitals

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<sup>1</sup> From an article by Asbury Smith in *The Christian Advocate*, July 9, 1931.

<sup>2</sup> In an article by Floyd Mulkey in *The Christian Advocate*, Oct. 23, 1947.



civilization could boast.<sup>3</sup> All this was done by combining the worship of God with the service of man. St. Benedict, of the sixth century, preached and published rules for the monastic life which were commonly adopted and still obtain in large measure, and they illustrate how worship and work go together:

Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore at fixed times the brethren ought to be occupied in manual labor; and again at fixed times in sacred reading. . . . Going out early from the first (6 A.M.) until about the fourth (10 A.M.) hour, they shall labor at what might be necessary. Moreover, from the fourth until about the sixth (12 noon) hour, they shall give themselves to reading. After the sixth hour, moreover, rising from table, they shall rest in their beds with all silence; or perchance he that wishes to read may so read to himself that he shall not disturb another. And nones (devotions, normally at 3 P.M.) shall be said rather early, about the middle of the eighth hour (2:30); and again they shall work at what is necessary until vespers.<sup>4</sup>

There are many rules for their devotional life, but we are concerned here with the alternation of worship and work.

One of the most interesting of the monks is known as Brother Lawrence. He was a cook three centuries ago in a Paris monastery, and his real name was Nicholas Herman (1611-1691). He is famous for a collection of sixteen letters and four accounts of conversations, together with some maxims, which collectively are entitled, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Finding it necessary to work most of the time, and unable to devote extended periods to worship and prayer, Brother Lawrence discovered that one could worship while he worked. So he said: "The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament." Brother Lawrence, as Joseph Fort Newton put it, turned tedium into *Te*

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to observe that a modern monk, Gregor Mendel, 1822-1884, abbot of Brunn, Austria, was the discoverer of the laws of heredity, the so-called Mendelian laws, by experimenting with garden peas.

<sup>4</sup> Ayer, J. C., *A Source Book for Ancient Church History*, p. 636 (New York; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924).

*Deum.* He has his modern counterpart in the maid, said to be a 19-year old girl, who wrote a poem quoted by G. Campbell Morgan in 1927, and often quoted since:

Lord of all pots and pans and things; since I've no time to be  
A saint by doing lovely things, or watching late with Thee,  
Or dreaming in the dawnlight, or storming heaven's gates,  
Make me a saint by getting meals, and washing up the plates.

Although I must have Martha's hands, I have a Mary mind;  
And when I black the boots and shoes, Thy sandals, Lord, I find.  
I think of how they trod the earth, what time I scrub the floor;  
Accept this meditation, Lord, I haven't time for more.

Warm all the kitchen with Thy love, and light it with Thy peace;  
Forgive me all my worrying, and make all grumbling cease.  
Thou who didst love to give men food, in room or by the sea,  
Accept this service that I do—I do it unto Thee.\*

Brother Lawrence and the modern maid both suggest that worship not only can alternate with our work, but it can infuse our work and inspire all that we do. The Apostle Paul offers the same thought in his counsel to pray "without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17, AV). Strictly speaking, one cannot "pray constantly" (RSV), but he can have the attitude of prayer, which is what Paul meant, and this can sustain one constantly. Orientation toward God in worship can influence the whole of life. Certainly, work can be kept fresh through worship.

### The Dignity of Work

And that brings us to a consideration of the dignity of work. There is a mistaken notion among some Christians that work is the curse of God for man's sin. Is this a necessary inference from the story in Genesis, chapter 2? On the contrary, do we not discover in verse 15 that the first man was put into the garden "to till it and keep it," that is, to work in it; and, presumably, the work was a joy. But when man had sinned and was driven from the

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\* M. K. H., In *The Westminster Record* (as quoted in *The Christian Advocate*, Nov. 1, 1925).

garden, he found the ground full of thorns and thistles and only by the "sweat of his face" could he wrest from it his "bread" (3:17-19). Here, in an early Bible story, vividly told in the childhood of the race, do we find profound insight into human nature. This is the punishment of sin: not work, but the distaste for work, which finds it only a difficulty and not a pleasure. But even in Genesis work is glorified, for God worked in creation and rested from his labor (2:3). In the Gospel of John the thought is carried further: God is always working for the good; his creative activity never ceases (5:17). Jesus takes this as justification for doing good on the sabbath day, the day of rest from secular labor, but not from work that reflects God's creative benevolence (John 5:16, 18).

The Bible has no quarrel with work. The Jews had a high respect for it. The rabbis, though they loved teaching (which was really their work), were required to work also with their hands, and they learned a trade. Thus the two great rabbis of Jesus' day were workers; Hillel worked as a woodcutter for half a denarius a day, and Shammai was a builder. It was said in later times that a rabbi worked at his trade one-third of the day and studied the rest of it. Jesus himself, as we know, was a carpenter by trade and worked at it until he was thirty or so (Luke 3:23). Paul was a tent-maker and proud of his work-record (2 Thessalonians 3:6-8) and correspondingly impatient with those who loafed. "If any one will not work," he said, "let him not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busy bodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living. Brethren, do not be weary in well-doing" (2 Thessalonians 3:10-13). Work can never fail if it is connected with God and dignified for what it is: the will of God for life. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," said Jesus (John 5:16). Can any man say less than that? "We must work the works of him . . . while it is day," Jesus also said (John 9:4). Can any man do less than that?

### One's Lifework

That brings us to an important final consideration: the question



of one's lifework. Here, assuredly, worship has a vital part to play. What one does for a living affects his life; and the Christian, living with God in worship, cannot be engaged in work that is contrary to the will of God as revealed in Christ. Once again, the worth of one's worship—the reality of his Christianity—will be revealed, in this case, by what he does to earn his living. Let us think of this under two heads: first, *the choice of a lifework*.

Choosing a lifework is one of the most important decisions one can make. Coming as it does in youth, it presents difficulties not easy of solution. There is the question of what one can do, what his abilities are, and where they can fit into the social pattern. It is not always easy to determine the precise thing one is cut out for. This is true not only when no specialized ability, or set of abilities, is obvious, but also when so many abilities are present that they cannot all be used in any given situation. The work of society is now so specialized that one can rarely use all his talents in what he does for a living; and, unless he makes it a point to have an avocation in addition to his vocation, he will be strangely dissatisfied. . . . Related to this is the question of one's inner desire, his deepest urge, the emotional well that will deliver a constant stream of energy for what one does. If one chooses the right kind of work for himself, it will be a tap line to this deep-lying well within him, and he will derive as much satisfaction from his work as the man will experience misery who is in the wrong work. One cannot do well what he is not "called" to do. Every man has his place in life, and the determination of it lies deeply implanted within his being. . . . And that suggests the question of divine calling. Does God summon only those who go into the ministry or some other kind of religious work? One of the cardinal tenets of Protestantism is the sacredness of all vocations. God calls all men who sincerely choose their vocation in the light of his will for their lives, as that will may be revealed in prayer or a prayerful estimate of their place in life. In this choice the experience of worship is essential. To think it all through in the atmosphere of worship; to register the decision in the spirit of worship; to draw from the inspiration of worship the determination to serve "under God"—these are vital experiences for the Christian.

Some subsidiary matters, relating to the choice of a lifework, may be considered briefly. Suppose, for instance, that, in spite of conscientious choice in the beginning, one finds himself in the wrong job; what will he do? The simple answer is: change jobs. Changing one's work, however, may be a difficult and, at times, a courageous thing to do. There may be uncertainty of the future for not only the individual but his family also. There may be social pressure to resist, ridicule to endure, wrong advice to reject. For the Christian, the change of one's work will be the registering of a decision in worship, even more than it was the first time. Nor should one be disheartened.

It is not always easy to discover God's will for life. Life is complex. One may not quickly understand himself; one's situation may be peculiarly difficult; one's opportunity at a given time may be particularly barren; society periodically offers little chance to do something positive, something creative, something specifically God-willed. One may have to take an interim job with a view to changing it later when a better chance of realizing God's will for one's life presents itself. This is a common experience.

Another subsidiary, but very important, question is the discovery in one's chosen work of practices that violate conscience. Should one work on Sunday? Must one obey his superior when it seems morally wrong, even if he can shift to his superior the responsibility for his actions? Should one countenance misrepresentation—in advertising, perhaps, or by hiding some of the facts in making a deal of some kind? Can one sit idly by when he sees others doing wrong, or finds shoddiness and inefficiency in operation? Can one resist the pressure of group or union when they are exercised in the wrong directions? These are extremely difficult problems, and there are no pat solutions.

Certainly, one will want to "lay them down before the Lord" (cf. Joshua 7:23) in worship and ask for guidance and help. Certainly, the Christian conscience, aroused and sustained by the experience of worship, will not be silent. Certainly, the Christian will do what he can to improve the situation. And, if he can do nothing, the Christian will, in the end, sever himself from such practices for conscience' sake. . . . It is for these reasons that a Christian will never be associated with work that is socially

harmful. The Church has long taken a stand on the liquor traffic as unworthy of Christian support. This may be difficult to accomplish in today's world where restaurants, in which one must eat, serve liquor; where radio stations, which may be tuned in, handle liquor "commercials"; where newspapers and magazines, which one needs, are largely supported by liquor advertising. But what is the Christian to do but have a conscience on the subject? If he does not, who will? If he does not protest in some way, who is going to? If nothing is done, what will happen? And is this not true of any socially demoralizing business?

The Christian will have a conscience on many current social evils—race discrimination, class distinctions, social snobbery, all kinds of rackets, every form of legalized wickedness; yes, and war, the consummation of so much evil—and not only avoid these as unworthy of the Christian, but work against them as incompatible with the will of God as discovered and kept alive in worship. The robber's old demand, "Your money or your life," has its relevance here. Certainly, the Christian will not barter his eternal life for the filthy lucre that is offered by some lines of endeavor. He would rather die first.

The second consideration in connection with one's lifework is *the way one works*. Is he a faithful worker? Does he give value for value received? Is he a clock-watcher, or is he interested in his job? Does he do his best or does he try to "get by"? There can be no doubt how these questions are answered in the case of the Christian who combines worship with his work. The Christian will be a conscientious worker because the God with whom he lives in worship demands it. It is not at all a question of what the boss demands. There are people whose very nature makes them painstaking and meticulous, and they cannot help being good workers, especially when the qualities they possess are a particular asset.

But the Christian who worships will be *morally* painstaking, even when the work itself does not call for special skill. He will, in particular, be fair and honest in his dealings with people: his boss, his employees, his customers; and all work, in the long run, involves people. He will try to do what is required of him, and he will do it as well as he knows how, for the purpose of



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serving his fellow men in the name of the God whom he worships (see Colossians 3:23; Ephesians 6:7). He will be fair about his wage or his earnings, not considering his work an opportunity to fleece the public, but a sharing in the common good by making available to all what he can do in order that he may benefit from all that they can do. He will understand that money is only a medium of exchange and must represent his contribution to society. He will recognize, therefore, that he is not entitled to more than he contributes in work; and work, not money, becomes the real means by which all participate in the welfare of humankind. (cf. Ephesians 4:28). No Christian who worships the God of all men, equally concerned with all, will think that God is so partial to him that he can be a parasite on society and live in leisure while others support him.

### Work Is Worship

The Christian, therefore, takes great pride in his work as unto God and for man. It is, in a way, an offering; an offering of one's true self on the altar of life, itself an act of worship. Principal Jacks speak of having once seen a delicate mathematical instrument made by a Moslem in India a thousand years ago. Around the edge of the fine brass work was the inscription, in delicate Arabic characters: "This is the work of Hussein Ali, Mechanic, Mathematician, and Servant of the Most High God." Though spoken by a Mohammedan, that represents the authentic spirit of the Christian who worships a better God and dares not display less of devotion to him in his work than did Hussein Ali.

Even if one is doing piecework in a factory, or the drudgery of homework, it is still possible to take pride in a job well done, a job done for God as well as for man. Hence the Apostle Paul says: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. . . . Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. . . . Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:

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1, 6, 2). It is that spirit, achieved and sustained in worship, that makes the Christian "a workman who has no need to be ashamed" (2 Timothy 2:15).

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you think your job has any connection with the will of God for your life? Did you choose it conscientiously?

2. Do you even think of God when you are at work? Do you think of people? Do you think of society?

3. How much dare one be a Christian at work? Does this apply to what one says or to what one does, or both?

4. Do you have a hobby which acts as a foil for your work? Is worship in any similar spense a foil?

5. Do you, in praying at night, review the events of the day before God and come to any insights or decisions? Do you anticipate the day and its work as you pray in the morning?

6. Is your life in any sense a planned life? Do you make room for worship in a daily schedule that includes work? Or do you take what comes next?

## CHAPTER VIII

### WORSHIP AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

WORSHIP, AS WE have seen, is man's answer to God's call, the human response to God. If man *does* respond and the experience of worship *is* realized, the result is bound to be a new life with God. Such a life with God is, properly, the spiritual life, and it is the desire and goal of Christian faith and practice. Just as life together in marriage is the end result of the courting and planning of a couple through whom the instinct of the ages is pressing for the establishment of a new home, so the spiritual life is the end result of all the urgings and strivings that bend human interest and ingenuity Godward in response to divine love and appeal bent manward.

The bold figure of marriage, used of the life with God, is not absent from the Bible itself. Hosea the prophet says, "In that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband' " (2:16), and the thought is echoed in Revelation 21:2: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." But the commoner figure is that of a father and children. Hosea pictures God's love in moving words: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. . . . It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms. . . . I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love . . . and I bent down to them and fed them. . . . How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! . . . My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender" (Hosea 11:1, 3-4, 8, 9).

Here in the Old Testament is the spirit of the New, and the Apostle Paul, in the chapter that speaks of the spiritual life that follows reconciliation with God, uses precisely the same figure of man's life with God: "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. . . . When we cry, 'Abba, Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of



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God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:14, 15b, 10-17).

The spiritual life, then, is life with the Heavenly Father, and is a relationship as intimate as that which obtains in our homes among the members of our families. Indeed, the life with God is so intimate and so vital that it comes before every other relationship, however dear. This is what Jesus means in what might seem at first reading a harsh saying: "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). The parallel version of this saying in Matthew is softer (10:37), but the forcefulness of the form in Luke is not to be ignored. The point is that one's relationship to Christ (and so, to God) must come first, so much so that any comparison between it and another relationship in life is as between love and hatred. We get a faint echo of this kind of loyalty in the lines of Richard Lovelace, from his poem, "To Lucasta, on Going to the Wars":

I could not love thee, Dear, so much,  
Loved I not honor more.

Love of honor is a prior loyalty, and one will—one must—choose it before he chooses family, and friends, and community—or, for that matter, security and pleasure and any other thing. Why? Because love of family and friends, success in life and enjoyment of its blessings, inhere in honor and virtue, the very basis of society. Without honor, without virtue, there is no family life and no community life.

How much more this is true of our relationship to God! Jesus could say, "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three" (Luke 12:51-52—another hard saying). But he could say it because he knew that unless we put first God's kingdom and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33), nothing else mattered. Everything lasting depended on that. We can afford to lose anything in conflict with that loyalty, because that loyalty includes everything that

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has the blessing of God and the guarantee of survival by the power of God. For God is the Giver of *every* good and perfect gift (James 1:17) and to be loyal to God is to have everything, and to reject God is to lose everything. Thus Jesus says: "There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time. . . . and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). And he also said, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life" (Mark 8:36, by which is meant life in the kingdom, i.e., eternal life: 8:38).

The spiritual life, therefore, is life with God in the kingdom, the family of God; and it involves COMMITMENT to God above every other commitment. Commitment, as we have seen, is the very purpose of worship. We answer God's call in order to give ourselves to God. No man can worship who will not give himself to God. He can *try* to worship. He may persuade himself that he has worshiped. But unless his worship has left him belonging to God, to do with as God sees fit, he has not truly worshiped. This was the experience of Isaiah. After his vision of the Lord, after his experience of cleansing, he heard the voice of God saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And Isaiah said, as every worshiper must say, "Here I am! Send me" (Isaiah 6:8). The hymnal is full of this authentic note of worship, but at no point more emphatically than Frances Ridley Havergal's great hymn of consecration:

Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee  
Take my moments and my days;  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

· · · · ·  
Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
At Thy feet its treasure store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for Thee.

Are we willing to be so committed in worship that we may enter into the fullness of the spiritual life?

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Let us not think that such commitment is merely a single experience. To be sure, there is the great first commitment which is our conversion, but surrendering of self is a lifetime task. Conversion is normally the acceptance of God's love in Christ and the commitment of self to God as one "bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), but then begins a process by which, one by one, the various areas of life are brought under the control of God. We have so many different desires; they need to be dedicated in turn to God. We have so many ambitions; they need to be made captive to God. We have so many interests; they need to be re-examined in the presence of God. We have so many prejudices; they need to be re-thought with the mind of Christ (cf. Mark 8:33; Acts 10:15).

Each new surrender is a painful loss, a cross; but each new commitment is a spiritual gain, a growth in grace. If we think that the Christian life in this sense is hard, let us recall that the Master himself kept surrendering his will to God: first as a boy of twelve in the temple when he realized the priority of God's fatherhood over the claims of his beloved earthly parents (Luke 2:49); again, at his baptism when he heard the call that meant giving up the security of his profession for the insecurity of national leadership (Matthew 3:13-4:11); yet again, when the people wanted to make him a king and he had to withdraw into obscurity to prevent what would have been for another a long-dreamed-of hope, but for him catastrophe under the will of God (John 6:15; cf. Matthew 16:23); at the end in the Garden, when his body naturally revolted against the thought of death and he prayed, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42); and, finally, on the cross, when the feeling of desertion by God wrung from him the heart-rending cry that makes him forever one with us in humanity, yet divine in his devotion to God to the very end (Mark 15:34, 39).

If we would grow unto the stature of the fulness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13), we must with the Apostle Paul learn to "complete what remains of Christ's afflictions" (Colossians 1:24), not because there is virtue in suffering as such but because the way to spiritual growth and blessing is the way of surrender. To use the words of Paul, "For his [Christ's] sake I have suffered the



loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ, and be found in him . . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:8, 10). Then, and only then, do we become independent of all that we have in this world, including our wealth and our comforts, and even our families (as selfishly possessed). Then, and only then, do we, as the meek, inherit all the earth (Matthew 5:5), and know how to be abased and how to abound (Philippians 4:12). Then, and only then, do we have not our own families merely but all humanity as our father and mother, brother and sister (Mark 3:34-35). Then, and only then, do we enter fully into God's love, and enjoy in all of its glory the spiritual life (see Ephesians 3:14-19).

The Christian mystics knew all of this very well. Of their number, we have space to cite the example of only two; the first is St. Francis of Assisi. Born in A.D. 1181 or A.D. 1182 as Giovanni Bernadone to a wealthy cloth merchant, nicknamed Francesco (Francis), he was early a leader in mischief and revelry, later a soldier and prisoner of war. But an illness developed another side of his character, and the day came when he renounced all he had and became a penniless follower of Christ. His first concern was restoring fallen churches, and it was in the Portiuncula, his favorite chapel in the plain outside of the town of Assisi, that the words of Christ to the apostles (Matthew 10:7-14), read in the service, were the clarion call to complete imitation of the Master (A.D. 1209). He organized his associates, whom he called the Minor, or Humbler, Brethren, and two by two they went about preaching repentance, singing, aiding the peasants in their work, caring for lepers and outcasts. The crowning achievement of St. Francis' life was to penetrate the Mohammedan line in Egypt during the Fifth Crusade and preach to the Sultan himself (A.D. 1219). The devotion of St. Francis was so great that it is legendary, and the striking story is told that at the end of his life, as he lay dying on the bare floor of the Portiuncula, the stigmata (or wounds of Christ) appeared in his hands and feet. Whatever the truth of this legend, it at least illustrates the character of this

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"Troubadour of Christ" and testifies to the consecration which was the secret of his spiritual power.

For a modern mystic whose life has been a demonstration of spiritual power we may think of E. Stanley Jones. In his first book, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, this great Methodist missionary and evangelist tells of an experience that is worth quoting in his own words.

I saw that unless I got help from somewhere I would have to give up my missionary career, go back to America and go to work on a farm to try to regain my health. It was one of my darkest hours. At that time I was in a meeting at Lucknow. While in prayer, not particularly thinking about myself, a Voice seemed to say, "Are you yourself ready for this work to which I have called you?" I replied, "No, Lord, I am done for. I have reached the end of my rope." The Voice replied, "If you will turn that over to me and not worry about it, I will take care of it." I quickly answered, "Lord, I close the bargain right here." A great peace settled into my heart and pervaded me. I knew it was done! Life—abundant life—had taken possession of me. I was so lifted up that I scarcely touched the road as I quietly walked home that night. Every inch was holy ground. For days after that I hardly knew I had a body. I went through the days, working all day and far into the night, and came down to bedtime wondering why in the world I should ever go to bed at all, for there was not the slightest trace of tiredness of any kind. I seemed possessed by Life and Peace and Rest—by Christ himself.<sup>1</sup>

Our experience may not match either that of St. Francis or that of Stanley Jones in dramatic quality, but the consecration that was fundamental to their experience must be fundamental to ours. The spiritual life depends directly upon increasingly complete consecration to God in Christ. We grow in grace and in the knowledge of God as we grow in devotion to his Christ. Who will say what God can do for us?

The second way in which worship contributes to the spiritual life is in FELLOWSHIP, or communion, with God. Communion,

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, E. Stanley, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, pp. 19-20. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1930).

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as we have seen, is the very essence of worship. It normally moves through stages, which are listed by Edgar S. Brightman as four: contemplation, revelation, communion, and fruition.

*Contemplation* is taking the belief in God and allowing it to become a reality. We think about God until he comes alive for us individually as Creator, Redeemer, Spirit. It is the only way God can be real, as it is the only way anybody can become real. We can ignore the person standing in front of us and act as if he were not there, simply by not paying attention to him. God expects us at least to pay attention to him.

*Revelation* follows as God takes an active part in our worship and makes himself directly known to us in some way. To quote Brightman: "In contemplation man is seeking; in revelation God is giving. In contemplation man's attitude is active; in revelation it is passive." At some point in our worship, God speaks and we hear; God reveals himself and we see. This is true, whether the worship be public or private. If it is not true, worship stops short of being complete.

Then follows *communion* in which God and man are mutually active in a two-way relationship. This cannot be described further, since it is essentially an intensely personal experience, as varied in character as human differences are bound to make it. This explains the variations in the reports of communion with God. It is certainly true that it is no small thing to be in direct contact with God; and no easy thing, either; for the physical senses are always breaking in on such holy communion. John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in the early seventeenth century, speaks of this vividly:

"I throw myself down in my chamber, and I call in, and invite God, and his angels thither; and when they are there, I neglect God and his angels for the noise of a fly, for the rattling of a coach, for the whining of a door; I talk on in the same posture of praying, eyes lifted up, knees bowed down, as if I prayed to God; and if God or his angels should ask me when I thought last of God in that prayer, I cannot tell. . . . A memory of yesterday's pleasures, a fear of tomorrow's dangers, a straw under my knee, a noise in mine ear, a light in mine eye, an anything, a nothing, a fancy, a chimera



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in my brain, troubles me in my prayer. So certainly is there nothing, nothing in spiritual things, perfect in this world.”<sup>2</sup>

All this is only too true. Nevertheless, if but for a few moments at a time, or for so long that time seems to be gone, it is possible to have such communion with God as to climax the experience of worship and bring life to its highest fulfillment.

But even this, inspiring as it is, is not the end of worship. The final stage is *fruition*, the reflection in life of communion with God, the “fruits of the Spirit”—love, joy, peace, and all the happy progeny of virtues (Galatians 5:22-23). One is a different kind of person because he has been in the presence of God, and his life shows it. There is no more vivid description of this than in the Bible story of Moses, who communed with God in the Mount (Exodus 33:17-23). “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai . . . [he] did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God” (34:30). Moses has not been the last person to have a shining face because he has talked with God. It is the glorious result for all who find God in the experience of worship.

It should be mentioned, before we leave the subject, that fellowship with God does not imply loss of individuality on the part of the worshiper. Some forms of mysticism assert identification of the creature with the Creator, even as a drop of water merges with, and is lost in, the ocean. Christianity teaches fellowship with, not absorption into, God. In the Christian experience personality is not diminished but enhanced. As we come into active relationship with God, we are more ourselves, not less; because we see ourselves for what we are, and by God’s grace we become what we ought to be, and enter into the realization of God’s purpose for our lives.

Also, let it be remembered that the experience of fellowship with God is not always neatly graded into the progressive steps outlined above. We do indeed move from contemplation to revelation to communion to fruition, but we are not always aware of it. Fellowship with God can be as normal and natural as the ex-

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Georgia Harkness in *Prayer and the Common Life*, pp. 144, 145. (New York & Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948).

pression of any friendship. It was said that "the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11), and the wonder is that this can be true of us as well. This is the central experience of the spiritual life.

Finally, worship contributes to the spiritual life the impulse to CREATIVE ENDEAVOR. As we have seen, worship is not confined to time nor place nor method. It is whenever and wherever and however God is realized. And by the same token the spiritual life is not sitting down and being spiritual, as if the quietistic were alone the spiritual. The spiritual life can be activist. It is finding God in what we do. It is living for Christ. It is investing our efforts with the right motive, as unto God (Colossians 3:23). It is the life of stewardship by which we recognize that all comes from God and must be used in accordance with his will: time, talents, possessions. It means making all of life a sacrament, so that all the ground we walk on is holy ground (cf. Exodus 3:5), and whatever we do, "in word or deed, [we] do . . . in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17).

In particular, the spiritual life means the creative life. If the Christian is to be perfect as God is perfect (Matthew 5:48), then he will reflect God's creative activity. The Christian is the leaven in the lump (Luke 13:21), the light in the darkness (Matthew 5:14-15), both active influences in inert situations. Christians are those who turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6) in order to set it right side up. Jesus spoke of the blessedness of the peacemaker (Matthew 5:9), and Paul glorified the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20), for the Christian reflects God's creation of the new man in Christ (v. 17). All creative ability is divine activity, and God works through all discoverers, inventors, artists, healers, reformers, so far as their work contributes to the new day of the kingdom (Revelation 21:1). So Paul urges us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our mind, that we may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2). The Christian is incorrigibly the perfectionist, because God is perfect. The spiritual life is living with, and working for, the perfect, for it is God who is at work in us, "both to will and to work for his good



pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). Only as we worship, however, do we keep in touch with the God who brought the world into being, and is working out a divine purpose whose accomplishment in the human realm depends upon the co-operation of his creatures.

But what of the ultimate spiritual experience? Is it given to every Christian as to the Apostle Paul to enjoy what was to him so overwhelming an experience that he speaks of it with reverent awe, as if it belonged to a person other than himself? But it is obviously an experience that is his own. "I know a man in Christ," he says, "who . . . was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" (2 Corinthians 12:3-4).

Here in the New Testament is a testimony to match that of Isaiah in the Old Testament (Isaiah, chapter 6). It is ineffable, as all overwhelming experiences are. How can one put into words what belongs to the realm of the possible rather than the actual, where "God has prepared for those who love him what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived" (1 Corinthians 2:9)? Paul was constantly aware of this realm, looking "not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). Consequently, as he grew older, his longing for this realm grew stronger; and, in writing to the church that stood closest to him in affection, that of Philippi, he said wistfully, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Philippians 1:23). But if "to die is gain," Paul is, nevertheless, willing to wait and serve and say, meanwhile, "For to me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). Here in these wonderful verses is surely revealed the inner meaning of the spiritual life!

But can we enter into it? May we too have the ecstatic vision that will assure us of the reality of the spiritual—in the sanctuary, perhaps, as had Isaiah; or on some Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-8), as had Paul.<sup>3</sup> Who will say? Perhaps the spiritual life will never

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<sup>3</sup> We need not, however, identify Acts 9:1-8 with 2 Corinthians 12:3-4, which was probably a later experience which took place we know not where.



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be to us the real thing that it was for Paul until we have our own authenticating experience, whatever it may be. John Wesley called it the "Second Blessing,"<sup>4</sup> and said, "Look for it every day, every hour, every moment! Why not this hour, this moment? Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith."<sup>5</sup> It is true that Wesley hesitated to claim the experience for himself and carefully examined hundreds who did claim to have it.<sup>6</sup> It is also true that Wesley did not make it a test of membership in a Methodist society. That depended upon "earnest desire," and Wesley was wise enough to require of Methodists not an ecstatic experience which they could not compel but the following which he wrote into the General Rules: "It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they shall continue to evidence their desire of salvation, by attending upon all the ordinances of God; such are: The public worship of God. The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded. The Supper of the Lord."<sup>7</sup> The Second Blessing, if it is to be desired and if it is to be realized, must be grounded in the "means of grace"—in the habit of worship.

And there, as we bring this book to a close, we rest the case. No one can say what God will do for a man or woman or child. But we, each of us, can say what we will do. We will make response in worship to the overtures God has already made to us in Jesus Christ. We will let his Spirit have its way in our hearts (1 Corinthians 2:9-12). And we will leave the rest with God.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is it asking too much of Christians to put their loyalty to God in Christ above their loyalty to their families?
2. Is there any difference between conversion and commitment? If not, can one be converted again and again? Can there be a total commitment without understanding in detail what is being committed?

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<sup>4</sup> Sangster, W. E., *The Path to Perfection*, p. 83. (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1943).

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by W. R. Cannon in *The Theology of John Wesley*, p. 242. (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1946).

<sup>6</sup> Sangster, W. E., *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Discipline of The Methodist Church* (1952), ¶ 97.

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3. Can one be so concerned about his experience of God that he frightens it away? Can we be as natural with God as with a human being?

4. Do we live creative lives? In what ways are our lives not creative? In what ways are they creative? Are they most creative in our human relationships?

5. Do Christians need to make apology for being perfectionists? In what sense is the perfectionist not Christian? In what sense is he truly Christian?

6. Is the spiritual life a key to the understanding of eternal life? Is one with a strong spiritual life likely to believe more confidently in eternal life?

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